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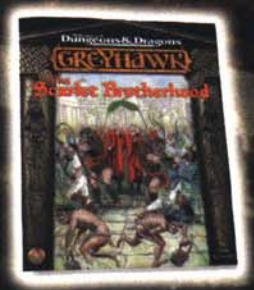

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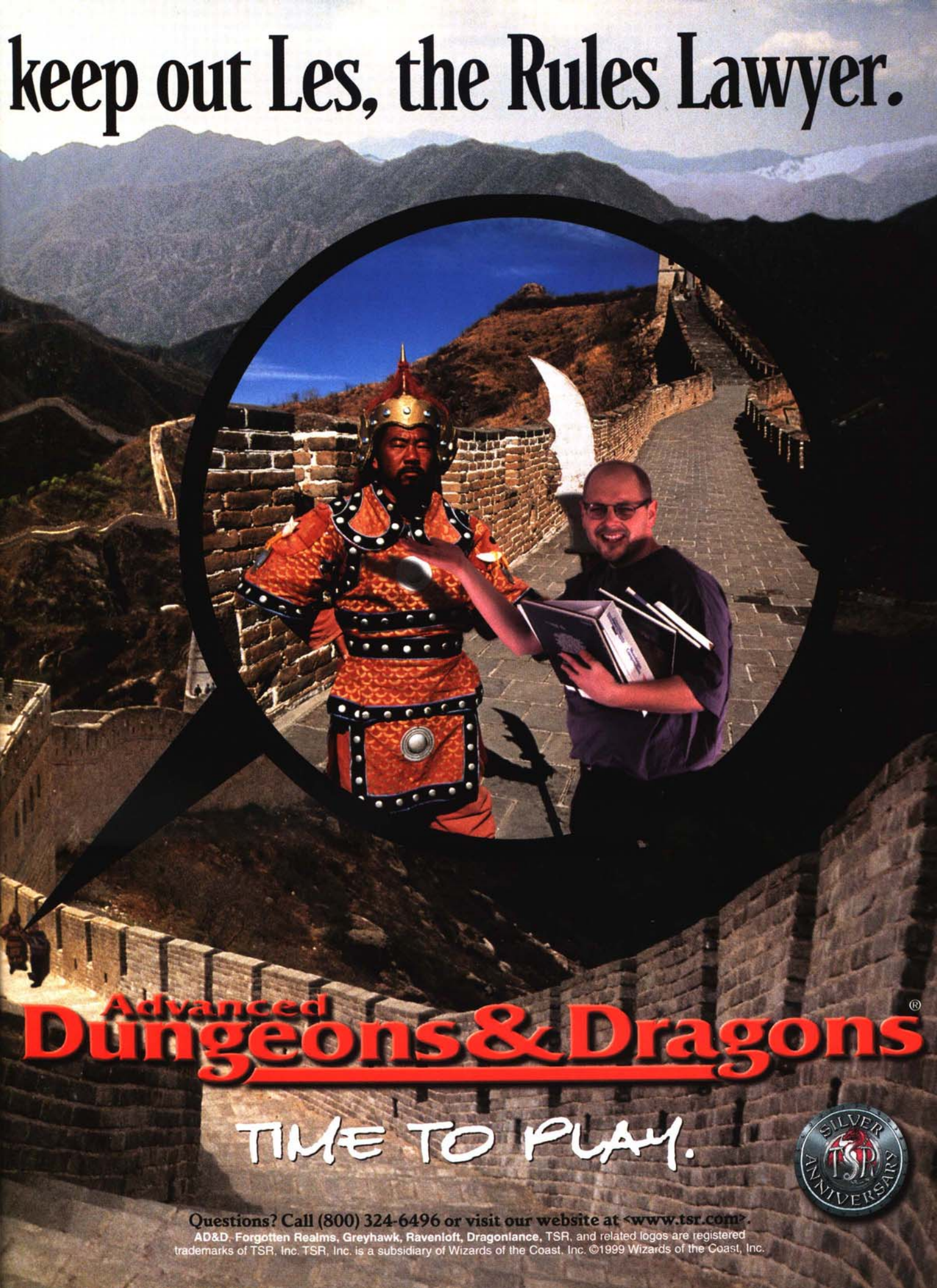

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DARK AGES

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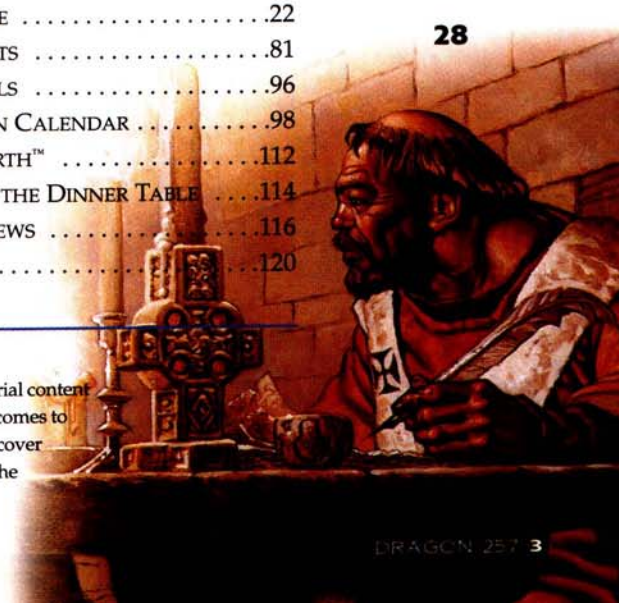

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ON THE COVER

The art of Roger Raupp covers the gamut from SF to historical subjects—much as the editorial content does this issue. Roger's interest in the historical, however, borders on obsessive when it comes to matters of King Arthur. This little-known fact made him our first and only choice for cover artist this month. Pleased as he is at having his work on the cover of the magazine he art directed a decade ago, he couldn't stop there. (Did we mention *obsessive*?)
For another view of Roger's Arthur, turn to Ben Bova's story on page 64.

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Changing History

Purists point out the difference between "hard" and "soft" science fiction. (That's not to say there's anything wrong with the latter; even purists love *Star Wars*, as long as you don't claim it's hard science fiction.) These purists quibble even among themselves, but one way to identify hard science fiction is to look for stories that make one scientifically plausible assumption and then follow its likely effects on human beings to their logical conclusion. What we call "soft" science fiction usually appears as space fantasies or superhero adventures. They might include plenty of technological-looking devices, but there's no effort to explain how or why any of it works. The "science" in these stories provides little more than props and costumes.

The same hard/soft division exists in fantasy, though not as clearly and not nearly to the same degree. "Hard" fantasy is harder to define than is hard science fiction. If there is such a thing, then Larry Niven demonstrates it in *The Magic Goes Away*, a novel in which he defines the "science" of his magic, then abides by his own rules. Still, it's a mess to define stories that depend on magic as anything "hard."

Instead, look at historical fantasy and alternative histories. That's where purists can draw the line between the "hard" and "soft" forms. Alternative histories, like hard science fiction, depend on taking one plausible event in history, changing it, and exploring the probable effects of that change on humans—and, of course, on our history.

Historical fantasy, on the other hand, requires only that you start with a world somewhat resembling the historical one. From that point, you can go anywhere you like. As long as you can still recognize your starting point, maybe it's your version of Elizabethan England, then it's still "historical." So what if Shakespeare is the Queen's Sorcerer and bids his familiar Ariel to pluck off the beard of that wicked alchemist, Christopher Marlowe? You recognize the names, so it's "historical"—well, at least as much as *Star Wars* is "scientific."

Alternate history is the exception rather than the rule in roleplaying game settings. Think of how many "almost-Englands" or "sort-of Romes" you've seen in AD&D settings. They aren't even close to a true alternate history in most cases, but somehow they still *seem* historical. In that sense, they serve their purpose by giving your game a more-or-less realistic starting place. From there, you can take your game wherever your imagination carries you.

In this issue, we present you with the Anglo-Saxon Dark Ages in a way that we hope will please history buffs and fantasy fans alike. Purists can easily ignore the goblins and Runecasters, while others can add Camelot and Merlin with all their grandeur and enchantment. However you change things for your own campaign, drop us a line to let us know how you decided to change history.

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Dragon® Magazine (ISSN 0279-6848) is published monthly except November (twice monthly) by TSR, Inc., 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, United States of America. Periodical-class postage paid at Lake Geneva, WI, U.S.A., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Dragon Magazine*, P.O. Box 469107, Escondido, CA 92046, U.S.A. USPS 318-790, ISSN 0279-6848. The postal address for all materials from the United States of America and Canada except subscription orders and change-of-address notices is: *Dragon Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, U.S.A.

DISTRIBUTION: *Dragon Magazine* is available from game and hobby shops throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and through a limited number of other overseas outlets. Newsstand distribution throughout the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom is by Curtis Circulation Company, 730 River Road, New Milford, NJ 07646-3048; telephone: (201) 634-7400.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Subscription rates via periodical-class mail are as follows: $34.95 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent to an address in the U.S.; $52.95 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent to an address in Canada; £34.95 for 12 issues sent to an address within the United Kingdom; £41.95 for 13 issues sent to an address in the UK; $57.95 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent by surface mail to any other address. Payment in full must accompany all subscription orders. Methods of payment include checks or money orders made payable to Dragon Magazine, or charges to valid MasterCard or VISA credit cards; send subscription orders with payments to *Dragon Magazine*, P.O. Box 469107, Escondido, CA 92046, USA; email dragon@pcspublink.com; phone **1-800-395-7760**. In the United Kingdom, methods of payment include cheques or money orders made payable to TSR Ltd., or charges to a valid ACCESS or VISA credit card; send subscription orders with payments to TSR Ltd., as per that address above. Prices are subject to change without prior notice. The issue expiration of each subscription is printed on the mailing label of each subscriber's copy of the magazine. Changes of address for the delivery of subscription copies must be received at least six weeks prior to the effective date of the change in order to assure uninterrupted delivery.

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A Source of Ideas

I've been reading *DRAGON® Magazine* and playing the AD&D® game since the mid-eighties. Like a lot of people, I started off thinking that numbers and stats were the only components of the game, and I read the magazine just for the new spells and more powerful magical items.

Somewhere along the way I started DMing and began using your magazine to get a better idea for rulings in the spirit of the game. I still have a closet full of back issues sitting in milk crates in no particular order. Over the years there have been many articles and columns that I had no use for, so I skipped over them. Now, my players are used to the familiar rummaging I do before just about every game. I dig through the magazines looking for something that clicked in my head during the last game session, or during the week. I flip through each table of contents seeking what I remembered and take a quick read through the article or column. I know that there are still quite a few pieces that I haven't read yet, but I can't say that they will never be of use to me.

I don't recommend that everybody try my style of GMing. I recommend that those who write in complaining about a specific piece remember that their changing preferences might get the best of them. Even if it merely stirs your own imagination, any article could come in handy in the future. *DRAGON Magazine* is not the law governing the AD&D game. Like it says at the beginning of either the *DMG* or the *Player's Handbook*, feel free to change the rules to fit your campaign ... everything is optional. In that light, *DRAGON Magazine* embodies the spirit of the game.

As for the humorous articles that some say will never be used in the campaign, you are probably right. I doubt that I will ever use a blink wooley mammoth, a *chainsword*, or the *explosive familiar* spell. I am not sure that I really ever needed to know the air speed velocity of a bozak draconian, and I don't see myself quoting poetry extolling the virtues of giant space hampsters or Nodwick. I did, however, enjoy a laugh the first time I read them. I still dig them out and show them to people who have never seen them, and they laugh as well. I don't know about the rest of you, but I need that occasionally. If you don't need the laughter, then please bear with those of us who do.

DRAGON *Magazine* is not the law governing the AD&D game.

I have never written in. Usually someone would state my feelings for me in their own letter, or at least many have come close to the mark. My advice to the great people at *DRAGON Magazine*: you cannot please everyone every issue, not even me. Don't be afraid to stand behind ideas. The magazine suffered when it changed every issue for a year or so trying to make everybody happy. Now it looks great and keeps getting better.

As for my games, I went from players balking at my every ruling to running, in their words, "the best game they've ever played." I could not have done it without y'all. Thank you for the "sage advice."

John Barnes
Spartanburg, SC

More for the Web

I just wanted to write to say what a great annual you put out this year. It's better than ever. I especially wanted to say how much I liked "By Dragons Ruled and Divided" by Ed Greenwood. I'd been hoping for a summary of the dragons in the North ever since he started the "Wyrms of the North" series.

What I'd really like to ask, though, is that you put the map of the dragon's domains on your Website. Since the Core Rules CD came out, I've found using my computer while roleplaying to be an invaluable resource. More material on your website would be greatly appreciated. Thanks, and keep up the good work.

Matthew Avery
Berkeley, CA

Your wish is our ... ah, you know the rest. The electronic copy of Linda Kekumu's "Wyrms of the North" map is already uploaded at http://www.profantasy.com. While you're online, stop by the TSR site (www.tsr.com) and check out the message boards and chat room in the "community" section. That's yet another good place to tell us what you think of the latest issue, and once a month or so to chat with the editorial staff and other gamers about topics ranging from submitting your own articles to brainstorming themes for the next few years.

Regarding 254

"PC Portraits": I've heard it said by someone else and I must agree. This is a fantastic idea. If you are thinking of doing it in color—*don't*. I don't like the idea of cutting up my magazine, so I would just photocopy the pictures, ensuring that they'll stay in black and white on my character sheets. Besides, the old tradition in AD&D is for each player to have a little sketch of his character in pencil. Black and white copies allow this tradition to remain somewhat intact. I can always go for a box of crayons, right?

Giantkin Theme: I don't recall you ever doing that before. The NPC giants were interesting, and the battle tactics showed more thought in that realm than I ever thought possible. The new undead giants were neat, especially Stephen Schwartz's artwork. Please let him know that I appreciate his work. As for the monsters, I guess I was disappointed—they were all undead. I was hoping for some different types of living giants, but they were interesting.

"The Measure of a Monster": I liked this piece by Lester Smith. I like historical elements of the AD&D game, and I like introducing some of those mythical archetypes. I would like more of these.

"Are you Proficient?": This was the most useful article in the magazine. Fantastic. I have organized all of the proficiencies from all of the AD&D game products over the years; now I have all of the proficiencies in one place. I was glad to see some new and thoughtful ones by John Pitsker. I'll add them the proficiency files.

"Life is the Pits": This described some great stuff to put into an adventure, especially a low-level one with younger players. Kind of a DM's grab bag of goodies. Reminds me of those old traps books by some other company. Alec J. Baclawski did a good job.

"Wyrms of the North": More stuff from Ed Greenwood. I admire Mr. Greenwood's proficient creativity, but I'm kind of getting to the point where I skip over it every month. I usually check out the new spells or magical items.

"Rogues Gallery": I like this column, especially if the characters are always taken from your general readership. What a kick for someone to see his or her character in print! That's a great idea, and it's useful too. DMs are always looking for interesting NPC personalities.

"Ecology of the Cyclopskin": This looks good, but I confess I didn't read it. I am just not as interested in these ecologies as I was many years ago.

"DragonMirth™": I love the jokes. I particularly like when you sprinkle them through the pages of the magazine. It's like finding a hidden gem while you are reading. A real treat.

"ProFiles": Jeff Easley, great cover, and great artist. It was good to find out more about him. I like these little tidbits of information.

Jason F. Smith
Heber City, UT

Credit Where It's Due

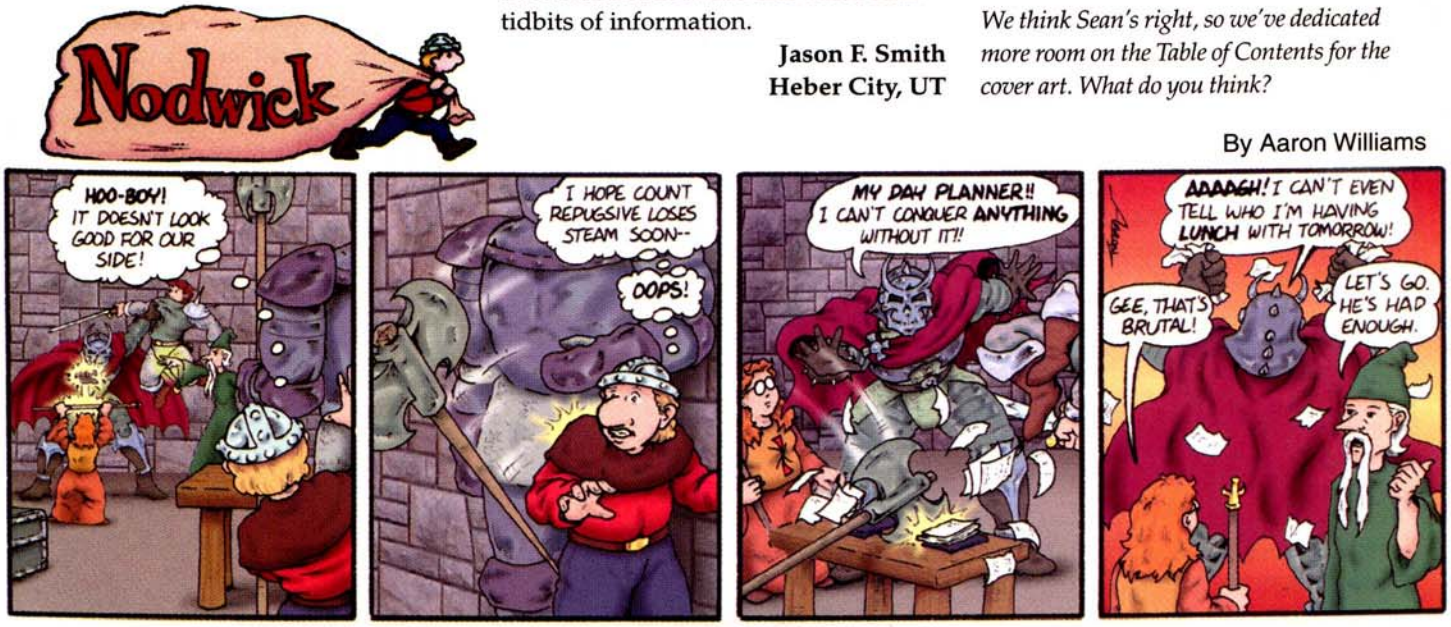
I have been a subscriber for nearly eight years now. I have begun to notice you no longer place as much interest in the descriptions of the cover art as you used to. I, for one, think that the artwork on the cover is as integral to the magazine as an article or even the letters columns; it is the first thing people see when they receive their new issue each month. However, I also think that the artist deserves more recognition for their hard work than just their name along with some stale, hastily written pun.

I used to like it when there would be a blurb about when we could expect to see more work by that same artist along with something about how that piece of art was found or how it was produced. Maybe even something about what medium the piece was done in: watercolor, oil on canvas, colored pencil, etc.

Fantasy art is a small but growing business; the artist signings at this year's Gen Con® game fair were testament to that. I would simply like to see credit where credit is due. *Dragon Magazine* cover art has always been a signature mark of the magazine, and to date the pieces selected have always represented what the magazine has stood for. To deny the artists and the readers the recognition deserved is simply a step in the wrong direction.

Sean Crotty
Stony Point, NY

We think Sean's right, so we've dedicated more room on the Table of Contents for the cover art. What do you think?


Nodwick
By Aaron Williams
HOO-BOY! IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD FOR OUR SIDE!
I HOPE COUNT REPUGSIVE LOSES STEAM SOON--
OOPS!
MY DAY PLANNER!! I CAN'T CONQUER ANYTHING WITHOUT IT!
AAAAGH! I CAN'T EVEN TELL WHO I'M HAVING LUNCH WITH TOMORROW!
GEE, THAT'S BRUTAL!
LET'S GO. HE'S HAD ENOUGH.

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Chronicles Casting Continued

In "DMail" from issue #255, Russell Thraikill had some good suggestions as for the cast of a TSR movie based on the DRAGONLANCE® Chronicles. Being one of the biggest DRAGONLANCE fans alive, I just have to reply with a list of my own personal choices for said movie.

Tanis Half-Elven: Mel Gibson and Bruce Willis are not good choices for this one. I would have to put Kevin Sorbo (*Hercules*) in this part.

Sturm Brightblade: This is a role made especially for Mel Gibson. 'Nuff-said.

Goldmoon: This would have to be Ariana Richards.

Riverwind: Lou Diamond Phillips is perfect for this one.

Tasslehoff: A toss up between Michael J. Fox and Jonathon Taylor Thomas.

Tika Waylan: Nicole Kidman. Who else has the right shade of red hair?

Highlord Ariakus: This is where Bruce Willis belongs.

Kitiara: Lucy Lawless is perfect for the part.

Raistlin Majere: My favorite character from the series would have to be portrayed by Christopher Walkin (*The Prophecy*).

Lord Soth: Ricardo Montalban (*Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*) is perfect for the part.

Flint Fireforge: Christopher Lambert (*Mortal Kombat*) would be perfect for the part, with a little computerized assistance.

Theros Ironfeld: I would be hard pressed to choose between Samuel L. Jackson and James Earl Jones.

Lauralanthalasa Kanan: Sharon Stone (*Basic Instinct*) would be a good choice.

Fizban the Fabulous: While I agree with Russell that Christopher Lloyd would be a good choice, I still have to say that Mel Brooks would be much better as the befuddled old mage who is really Paladine.

James Earl Jones would make an excellent voice for a silver or gold dragon.

Frank Vittoe
Raleigh, NC

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Chessboard shown much smaller than actual size of 18½" x 18½" x 3".

Pieces shown smaller than actual size.

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Forum

Question of the Month

Respond to the Question of the Month or any other roleplaying topic by mailing "Forum," DRAGON® Magazine, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, USA; dmail@wizards.com. Include your full name and mailing address; we won't print a letter sent anonymously. We'll withhold your name or print your full address if you wish.

Who are the PCs in your campaign? Are they normal folk who "work" as adventurers? Are they legendary heroes? Something in between?

A Level Playing Field

The level system has been brought up for discussion several times. Yes, the current level system isn't very realistic, but come on: it's fantasy, not real life. I agree with Leon Chang's premise (from issue #252) that skill-based systems can be nitpicky. Also, there is something to be said for the feeling of accomplishment that comes from finally reaching the next level. That feeling just isn't present in games where a single statistic improves by one at the end of each session. Skill-based systems may currently be popular, but it doesn't seem to have affected the AD&D® game. After all, if you want a skill-based system you have the PLAYER'S OPTION® books.

There is no reason that the AD&D game must move away from the level system.

There is no reason that the AD&D game must move away from the level system. Justin Bacon's computer analogy (issues #249 and #254) can be turned completely around. DOS has been around for almost twenty years. Windows has been around for at least ten years. Each of these systems have been updated many times, and neither has been abandoned. Windows 95 and 98 hide DOS in a shell, but the code for running Windows still operates out of DOS. This is obvious just by watching the command codes scroll by when the computer boots up. My point is this: the level system is still a valid way to run an RPG, just as DOS is still useful, even in combination with the newer Windows system.

Now that I've said that, I don't want people to think that the current level system is the only way to go, or even the best way. I have a suggestion for adjusting the level system that makes it more realistic and also addresses some of the other problems people have discussed. I recommend splitting the system into two different level scores. The first is the Combat Level, and the second is the Skill Level.

The Combat Level would be based on XP gained from killing monsters. This allows Combat Levels to increase more uniformly across the classes. After all, if your character can kill a red dragon, then your character deserves to have a higher Combat Level. This can be explained by calling it practice with the weapon to increase THAC0 and generally increasing the characters' confidence in their ability to face opponents. This promotes realism because it clearly delineates the veteran warriors from the green troops (or the Mage that rose in level through book knowledge alone). A Dungeon Master (DM) who emphasizes hack-and-slash gaming will have his or her players rise more quickly in Combat Level.

Skill Levels act as the foil to Combat Levels. A character's Skill Level would be based on XP for time spent roleplaying, training, and working on proficiencies. The skill levels for each class could differ as widely as necessary, but the idea is to let characters learn more stuff or get better at things the longer they study and practice. It would certainly make Mage schools and Lloyd Brown III's "Weaponmasters of the Flanaess" (*DRAGON® Magazine Annual* #3) more popular with the players if they could learn new skills at a quicker rate. Skill Levels would determine nonweapon and weapon proficiencies, specialization, and mastery. They would confer spellcasting levels and might clarify spell research. I think it should also improve the proficiency checks for proficiencies a player has used for a while. This brings realism to the game by letting anyone attend college, whether they are 18 or 388. A DM who emphasizes noncombat scenarios will have his or her players rise more quickly in Skill Level.

Tim Ellenbecker
Minneapolis, MN

Keep It Simple

At its roots, the strength of the AD&D game is its simplicity. Simplicity allows for faster play. It allows the core rules to be applied to a variety of settings and concepts. Most importantly, from a fiscal standpoint and therefore to the game's survival and continued support, is the game's ability to incorporate people who have never played an RPG in their lives into an adventure rapidly, without frightening them away with a wall of complex numbers, charts, and jargon. Indeed, if a more experienced player takes but a few minutes to assist a novice with the minimal bookkeeping, the AD&D game can actually be played on a nearly intuitive level without reading the rules before "sampling" the game itself. This ease of access to those who would otherwise not even enter a hobby shop is priceless. The AD&D game's most powerful sales tool is word of

mouth. The axiom of "Keep It Simple, Stupid" is certainly applicable to game design.

The above stated, what portion(s) of the game should be more detailed, even at the cost of game play? None. The single possible exception could be to "front-load" the game; that is, add complications to the portions of play that do not affect the playing session itself (the most obvious example of this is character creation) to simplify and speed play during the group session. In the case of AD&D, this design technique would undermine a novice player's ease of entry into the game. For this reason, if a more complex system of character generation (or similar innovation) were to be employed, the game as a whole would be better served if this innovation was relegated to campaign settings, optional rules, or similar areas that would allow it to be applied incrementally to prevent overwhelming the new player. It cannot be expressed strongly enough: no game change should be introduced that would interfere with or contradict the core rules or require that these new, secondary rules be learned before play may begin.

The issue of which portions of the game should be simplified is more difficult to address, for in this area the discussion is not so clear-cut. At this point, I must speak mainly from personal experience (has it really been over twenty years since I began to DM?) and preference.

Classes: Sub-classes and kits are extraneous and counter-productive to roleplaying. They cater only to power gamers and are not efficacious to the development of well-rounded characters. Too many players use character class as a crutch for character development. What is a Ranger? (50% Fighter, 25% Thief, 25% Mage or Druid), a Barbarian? (a Fighter with an attitude), a Cavalier ? (a Fighter in armor with a code of honor), an Illusionist? (a Wizard with a special spell list), an Assassin? (the best assassins may not even be Thieves at all but Fighter/Mages), and a Bard? (well the debate on that rages across an entire host of class combinations). Beyond this, the dual- and multi-class rules are confusing and inappropriately punitive. It makes little sense that, to change to a new class, a character must have very good statistics in the class to be abandoned. It makes even less sense to impose arbitrary limits on the advancement of various non-human races. (This does not result in game balance, but instead in a pair of imbalances with nonhumans dominating the lower levels and humans, the higher.) It would be far simpler and more fair to allow multi-classing of any of the core classes (Fighter/Mage/Thief/Cleric) in a pre-stated percentage ratio, allowing, perhaps, no more than three classes and a minimum percentage per class of 25%. These changes allow both the flexibility of character creation and the rules clarity needed to keep the game moving along smoothly.

Race: On the surface, there seem to be too many available races. On the other hand, AD&D has always pushed the envelope of racial roleplaying. (The old *Rogues Gallery* had a lizard man long before the actual rules even hinted at the possibility.) Examination of the many available races shows that, excepting the one page summary of the race presented in the *PH*, the majority of the rules relating to character race are about multi-classing, a problem that can be fixed without removing classes.

Magic: This specific subject is a lightning rod for opinions. For the sake of brevity, let me merely point out that, to maintain the theme of simplicity, no new magic rules should be instituted that require a player to do more than know the spell descriptions in the *PH*. Options would be greatly welcomed by the playing community, and the large number of spells in print is a source of confusion in itself, but the options should never conflict with or undermine the base system. If players wish to play an intricate magic system, they will be drawn to games like *Ars Magica**. There is a definite appeal to the "memorize and cast" directness of the AD&D game's magic system, especially for the novice or social player.

Melee: A fast list of areas that are usually changed to house rules for ease of play and should be examined: weapon speed factors, individual initiative, missile fire into melee, encumbrance, etc. Talk to a dozen different gaming groups and it rapidly becomes apparent which individual melee rules are being modified or not being used at all. This is an area best examined by playtesting with a few teams of new players. Fans of detailed combat are already playing *Rolemaster** or *Warhammer**. The AD&D game would be ill- advised to compete for these players at the cost of the game's core audience.

ost nonweapon proficiencies are redundant statements of skills that all characters should obviously have ...

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Most nonweapon proficiencies are redundant statements of skills that all characters should obviously have, but are part of the game because the players do not trust the DM to assume that PCs have obvious abilities without some quantitative rule to defend themselves. The remainder of these proficiencies, such as Blind-fighting, are actually weapon skills disquised as nonweapon skills. If it is a new skill, learn it through roleplaying and write it on your character sheet to remember it. If it is something the character should rightfully be able to know or do, they have the skill. The AD&D game does not need these new rules, just a fair DM.

The most important area of the AD&D game which should be examined and simplified is the layout and presentation of the gaming material itself. AD&D material has always been disorganized, and 2nd Edition only exacerbated the matter. Many nonplayers have the (false) perception that they must invest a large amount of capital into gaming material before they can play—*PH*, *DMG*, one *Monstrous Manual*™ book, *Tome of Magic*, a book of kits (even if only for the

one class the player wants to play), etc. Even without getting into *Player's Option: Skill & Powers* and their ilk, the external perception of the game is that one must spend over $100 before running a character. This is not true, but the perception is there. This could be alleviated by packaging and presenting the products in a different manner. Most of the *PH* is spells, and a large portion of the *DMG* is taken up with magical items. If the number of spells given in the *PH* and the number of items in the *DMG* are reduced, the *PH* and *DMG* could be consolidated into a single book of core rules. "One book and play" has a definite appeal to the gamer who may be unsure of which gaming system they wish to invest in. Want more spells? Buy a book of spells. Want more magical items? Buy a book of magical items. More races? You get the idea: minimal initial investment followed by expansion as desired.

Once a player begins the game, the supplemental products sell themselves. If certain settings need special rules (like the Ravenloft® campaign setting), a detailed character background generation system (like the Dark Sun® setting), special spellcasting rules (like the Forgotten Realms® setting), or other rules modifications, put these rules within the campaign setting boxed sets. If a module is for one of these specific settings, these rule changes are reflected within the module. If the module is not setting specific, only the core rules need apply to run the adventure. This change drastically streamlines the interpretation and application of the rules, increases the appeal to new players, and actually results in no real change in product line, only a different presentation. All things considered, this would be a large gain for a little work (mostly in editing and formatting).

The AD&D game is based on simplicity. Tampering with that premise is tampering with, and thereby risking, the entire structure of the game. Simple, fast, and open—the AD&D game is roleplaying. The "Tactical Simulations" distinction has been gone from TSR for years; let's not bring it back. Every moment of a playing session spent on dice, numbers, books, and charts is a moment spent not only away from roleplaying but also away from playing at all.

M. Keaton
Center Line, MI

More Third Edition

We've been arguing about the 3rd Edition and the changes that should be made. Here are my two cents on the subject:

Experience: I love experience points, and I think they work great. I give experience for all sorts of things, like roleplaying and problem solving, as well as treasure gathering and monster slaying. The rules should focus more on different methods of gaining experience points. I think it is the best way to measure the success of a character.

Justin Bacon's Classes vs. Templates Idea: Perhaps Justin hasn't read the *Player's Option: Skills & Powers* rules. His desired template system is already in place. Different templates (character classes), which can be customized by using character points in these rule books. Furthermore, character races can be altered this way as well.

he rules should focus more on different methods of gaining experience points.

My group has even created a way to integrate the *Skills & Powers* abilities to each class without using the character points. We allow these abilities or hindrances to be applied to a character and *then* apply an experience point penalty or bonus. This system is amazingly effective. For instance, if a Fighter wants to start using a few Thief abilities, or cast some spells, or attack an extra time each round, he takes a substantial experience point penalty to *all* experience earned throughout his career. The concept is simple: a character can do anything she wants; she just has to pay to do it by advancing far slower than other members of her class.

The continued use of classes (as templates) is comfortable to us old players and is augmented by the excellent and creative adjustments in the Player's Option books. If I were designing the 3rd Edition, I would put both methods of character and race creation in. I would use the point system and the normal class system, with the augmented abilities costing points or experience penalties. This removes the ridiculous multi- and dual-class concepts. Any class or race can gain any skill in whatever combination; they just have to pay for it. A multi-classed Cleric/Fighter would advance half as fast as a normal Fighter. With the experience point penalties system, a Fighter who has clerical abilities advances half as fast as one without. They are the same. It's a great system, one that is actually more useful than the point system. The point system limits you because you only have a finite amount of points. With the experience penalty system you can do whatever you want. If you want a Fighter/Cleric/ Wizard/Thief, fine. It takes roughly 10,000 experience points just to reach 2nd level. Meanwhile everyone else is achieving 4th level and is probably far more powerful than the mish-mash character. The difference is that a 20th-level multi-classed character would be far more powerful. No one has been willing to try and suffer through to that point yet, so I can't tell you what would happen.

Spellcasting: Geoffrey Plauche expresses dislike for the current spell system in which a Mage forgets his spells after he casts it. He should reference the *Player's Option: Spells & Magic* book which offers some excellent options for spellcasters that are different from the current system.

Is a 3rd Edition Necessary? Dana Aquadro and Geoffrey Plauche have stated that a 3rd Edition should be made only if substantial changes were made to the game; otherwise, why ask everyone to shell out all that money?

Let me comment by referring to the justification for making a 2nd Edition of the game. The 2nd Edition was similarly questioned when it was conceived. Many people offered the opinion that it wasn't necessary. But in truth, the 2nd Edition *was* necessary. The first and foremost reason for this decision was

because the 1st-Edition rules were unorganized. A reorganization of the rules was necessary. When David Cook set out to create the 2nd Edition, he refrained from reinventing the game and simply created a streamlined, highly organized edition that was more useful and easy to use.

A few new ideas that had been introduced earlier showed up in the 2nd Edition, namely spell spheres, Specialist Mages, and proficiencies. A few character classes were removed, and the Bard was reworked. Overall it was cleanly done and well conceived. Later they created the Character Kit idea. But why a 3rd Edition? I can think of three possible reasons:

1. The rules are unorganized. With the accumulation of ten years of books, there are as many new rules as there were last time. The PLAYER'S OPTION books have many different ideas. Furthermore, there are newer and better systems and ideas that need to be integrated into the AD&D game. Basically, the rules themselves need to be changed and updated.

2. This idea is a marketing idea. Role-playing games have had some problems lately. Perhaps a new edition of the game can bring in more dollars. Maybe they are just trying to save the game. Such is the power of the market.

3. Wizards of the Coast bought the game, and they want to change it because it's theirs now. They just want to fiddle with it, make it their own. Wizards of the Coast apparently has yet to justify to anyone why they are thinking about a 3rd Edition.

It seems funny that they ask us what we think should be in it, but they aren't telling us *why* they are doing it. If you think about it, it's probably a combination of all three of the reasons I've listed, but I think it would be good form if WotC told us why they are doing this. To sum up, a 3rd Edition could be useful, but not if it completely changes the old system. If 3rd-Edition AD&D is a completely different game, I believe sales on the products will be disappointing. If that's the case, we can all take solace in the fact that there is a lot of 2nd-Edition material already out, and we still have our brains and our creativity. We can make it up for ourselves ... but, of course, we've been doing that all along.

Jason F. Smith
Heber City, Utah

Make Another Save

After watching the recent discussion in these pages about the possibility of a 3rd Edition, I'd like to bring up one aspect of the current game that I think could use improvement—the saving throw system.

I've always found this to be a somewhat abstract way of determining the results of magic and poison, and the way that high-level characters become practically immune to such things has always been a quirk in the game.

Let ability scores do the work of saving throws.

It seems unrealistic to me that characters become more resistant to magic, poison, and other such things just because they advance in levels, especially to the degree that it occurs in the saving throw system. Or, to take another good example, that surviving the breath weapon of a dragon should be based on this system, which has little to do with the character's ability scores or talents.

The solution I would suggest is to base saving throw situations around the character's ability scores instead. Constitution checks can be used to resist poison, Dexterity checks can serve to help a character dodge dragon fire, and the Wisdom score could be the basis of resisting magical effects.

Indeed, the improvement I would like to see in a 3rd Edition of the game would be a comprehensive expansion of ability scores and their role in the game. I continually find that the ability scores as they are currently broken up prove inadequate to situations that arise in our stories. When I want a PC to determine whether they can notice something out of the ordinary, I'm often forced to fall back on an Intelligence check, which doesn't quite fit. I like the attribute systems presented in the ALTERNITY® game and the SAGA® system—they seem better suited to testing a character based on their raw abilities. The PLAYER'S OPTION rules help somewhat, but many still seem ambiguous or unsuited to situations that arise.

Let ability scores do the work of saving throws. That way, characters would not become mysteriously immune to poison or magic at high levels. It would dampen the heavy power that high-level characters often achieve and clean up a messy mechanic that has never worked well in the first place.

David Higgins
Los Angeles, CA

Back to Nature

In the AD&D game, Druids are the most overlooked class. Many people do not understand how helpful Druids are. They can make travel faster, slow down foes, talk to animals and plants, call on the powers of nature, and even heal the sick. They are better in a fight than most Clerics. Even when underground or in a dungeon their powers are useful! Most players use Druids improperly, leaving them feeling thier Druid characters are a waste of time. I am currently playing a Druid. At first, my party felt I was a useless character; however, after years of playing as a Druid, I showed them how powerful a Druid can be.

I am writing this letter to encourage players to be Druids and say, "Hey, Druids are a very good class!" and for DMs to wake up and think, "Hey! Making an adventure for Druids would be fun!" And, in writing this letter, I encourage TSR to make more outdoor adventures.

Joseph F. Matons
Staten Island, NY

Dungeoncraft

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By Ray Winninger

Last month, we began fleshing out our AD&D® world by beginning with the "hook" or single characteristic that distinguishes our campaign world from most others. We also explored the first two Rules of Dungeoncraft:

1. *Never force yourself to create more than you must;* and

2. *Whenever you fill in a major piece of the campaign world, always devise at least one secret related to that piece.*

This month, we'll continue sketching out the basic overview of the campaign world by looking at home bases, politics, and government.

The Government You Deserve

Obviously, the sort of government in the campaign locale is likely to have a profound impact upon the PCs and their adventures. Many of the published AD&D game settings devote a lot of pages to this topic, detailing noble hierarchies, laws, and taxation systems. While such information will eventually prove useful, for now you should follow the First Rule and create only the information you need to get started. Just to recap, this approach gives you two important advantages: it gets you up and playing as fast as possible, and it keeps your options open so you can add more later.

What sort of information do you need to know about local politics to begin the campaign? The quick answer is, "just enough to give the players some idea of the world in which they live." For now, you want to provide a rough sketch that will help the players' imaginations fill in their surroundings. You won't need NPC write-ups for important government officials, specific crime and punishment systems, or detailed military chains-of-command.

Since it has the greatest potential impact upon your first several game sessions, start by considering local politics.

Two different levels of politics are of interest, and you should consider them separately. You must know something about politics on the broad "national" level and something about politics on the focused "local" level. Although none of this information will have a direct impact upon a play session for quite some time, it's likely to help you create other details that are more directly relevant. Deciding a few things about political matters also provides a few more "secrets" (from the Second Rule of Dungeoncraft) that you can use to shape your world.

Home Base

Since it has the greatest potential impact upon your first several game sessions, start by considering local politics. Think, at first, in terms of geography. Your goal here is to decide upon a "home base" for the PCs, somewhere relatively safe and secure where they can rest and count their treasure between adventures. This base might serve as the locale in which all the player characters came of age. It should almost certainly serve as the site of their first meeting. You shouldn't agonize over this decision for too long—your PCs aren't going to stay in this location forever. (By the time they reach 4th or 5th level, you'll probably move them along to bigger and better things.) Once you've decided upon a suitable base, you should think about who rules this base (if anyone), where the nearest uncivilized or wilderness areas are located, how the home base interacts with those areas, and whether there are any local rules of interest. There are a number of basic home-base templates:

City

You might choose to base your campaign in a large fantasy city with thousands of inhabitants. Such a locale has several advantages—a wide variety of shops and services at the players' disposal, constant traffic flowing through the city, and a huge number of interesting NPCs with whom the PCs might interact. On the other hand, using a city as your base of operations probably has

even more disadvantages. Cities are large and time consuming to create and map. Also, large cities are so rare and important to most fantasy worlds that they are bound to have lots of contact with the outside world. In the early going, this might be a problem, since you don't know all that much about your world yet. Basing your campaign in a city will almost certainly keep you scrambling to create new details about the game world. While some DMs prefer such a challenge, most are best served by trying to find a nice, semi-isolated locale to use as the setting for the early adventures.

Cities are generally overseen by an important political official who sits atop a large bureaucracy, usually an appropriately high-ranking noble (a duke) or a civil servant (a Lord Mayor). (Of course, nothing says you must use the standard medieval European titles; feel free to use or invent any titles you wish.) Since cities normally serve as centers of trade and knowledge, some of the bureaucrats who govern the city are inevitably dedicated to these functions—perhaps a Master of the Docks who authorizes all cargo that comes in and out of the city (and makes sure the appropriate tax is collected) or a Dean of Colleges who grants visiting scholars permission to use the city's archives. Because a city is bound to be of strategic importance to the kingdom or empire that controls it, it's likely to be heavily defended and thus home to one or more large military formations (and more bureaucrats, who oversee these formations). Cities are also likely to have their own highly organized constabulary serving as a sort of medieval police force (with still more bureaucrats to head them).

Stronghold

A stronghold is a keep or fortress built on the fringe of an important border. Because the stronghold usually sits at an important crossroads or waypoint, it often becomes a stopover on various trading routes and a gathering point for local loners (hunters, trappers, prospectors, and adventurers). Strongholds have an important characteristic that makes them ideal home bases—the fact that they are defensive constructs suggests a close proximity to some sort of perilous region (perhaps an enemy nation, a dangerous wilderness, or the territory of a threatening humanoid tribe). Such a conveniently located "area of mystery and danger" is an obvious and accessible setting for adventures (exploring ruins out in the perilous wilderness, protecting the inhabitants of the stronghold from the marauding humanoid tribe, unmasking enemy spies, etc.). Most strongholds are also appropriately isolated from the rest of civilization, cutting down on the amount of game world detail you'll need to create before beginning play.

Because strongholds are usually the only outposts of civilization in their vicinity, small towns or villages often spring up around them, offering various services to the stronghold's steady stream of visitors. Sometimes these towns are encompassed by the walls of the hold, sometimes they spring up immediately outside the hold, and sometimes they are founded a short distance away from the hold next to another convenient geographical feature (such as a pond or river). Since the towns that grow up around strongholds are usually small and in a constant state of flux, with new businesses frequently opening and closing, they're easily manageable for a DM. When gaming in such a town, you can start with just a few shops and key inhabitants and expand as you're ready.

Strongholds have an important characteristic that makes them ideal home bases ...

Typically, strongholds are under the command of an important military official, such as a marshal or warden, though they are sometimes overseen by a minor noble (such as a baron). Most often, the stronghold commander ultimately answers to a powerful noble or prince who is responsible for the defense of the entire region. Because strongholds are usually located far away from more civilized areas, their commanders are usually given wide latitude when it comes to enforcing justice. When combined with the considerable military forces at their disposal, this power can make a despotic commander particularly fearsome.

Feudal Towns

Feudal towns are mid-sized settlements constructed in the shadow of an important noble's castle or fortress. Generally, such towns are founded upon a pact between the noble and the townspeople. In return for overseeing his lands, the noble offers the townspeople protection from perils ranging from rampaging monsters to famines and other calamities. (In these cases, the noble is expected to dip into his personal stores to provide for his people.) Although the pact between the noble and the townspeople is rarely spelled out, it's usually well understood by both parties. A noble who fails to live up to his end of the bargain may expect little sympathy from neighboring nobles should the townspeople decide to revolt against him. For their part, the townspeople are typically obligated to hunt, farm, or mine the land, while ceding the lion's share of the spoils to the landowner. Usually, no one questions the noble's right to discipline any townsperson who abuses this trust.

The exact stature of the noble responsible for a feudal town generally varies with the size of the kingdom in question. In some small kingdoms, a full prince might be responsible for his own feudal town, though the post is customarily held by a duke or baron. While the noble who oversees a feudal town (or his appointed underlings) has the last word in justice, taxation, and privileges for the town's residents, the typical proximity to other, larger feudal towns generally prevents him from exercising the sort of total control commonly displayed in strongholds. Typically, the noble is a vassal of a nearby, more powerful noble who'd like to avoid a peasant revolt that can easily spread to other nearby towns. All but the most evil or corrupt feudal

masters are usually willing to intercede and gently correct the behavior of a vassal who violates the understood trust of the townspeople.

Farming Village

While both the stronghold and feudal village are largely defensive constructs, some small villages are more valuable economically. Typically, these villages lie deep within the borders of a kingdom, where defense is not as great a concern. Most "farming villages" are actually devoted to one of four commercial ventures: farming, mining, hunting, or fishing. The village exists solely to allow its inhabitants to practice their craft efficiently. Because of the steady stream of commodities they produce, most of these villages are important stops on various trade routes.

When viewed as a prospective base of operations, a farming village has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, they are usually rustic and idyllic, providing the PCs with a nice safe base of operations where they can relax between adventures. Usually, even long-term activities (such as spell research or convalescence) can be carried out in a farming village without fear of calamity or interruption. On the other hand, the fact that such villages are so neatly tucked out of the way suggests that the PCs might be forced to travel long distances to reach adventure sites, which are typically situated in "dangerous" or "mysterious" areas. It's likely that basing the PCs in a farming village will have the added effect of forcing you to create a largish section of your campaign world rather quickly. Sometimes, you can offset this drawback by employing a bit of geography. Suppose, for instance, that your mining village lies along a stream and a trail, high in the mountains and isolated from the rest of the campaign world. The trail is a major route for trading caravans and leads to the larger kingdom. The stream winds through 15 or 20 miles of some extremely inhospitable terrain and down into a perilous valley. Although the village is located far from the valley and has nothing to fear from its inhabitants, the PCs can quickly and easily travel down into the valley by boat. More importantly, since the intervening rocky terrain is so inhospitable, there's no reason for you to make up any details about it, so you can skip directly to detailing the smallish valley.

Normally, farming villages are governed by a civil servant (perhaps a mayor or burgermeister) who is appointed by a distant noble. Nobles rarely reside in or around such villages and as a consequence, their residents tend to greet the occasional visiting knight or minor peer with a combination of awe and fear. Farming villages rarely boast any sort of organized constabulary, instead relying upon volunteers from among the townsfolk to protect the village from interlopers.

No one says your base of operations must be confined to a single geographic location.

Wandering Tribal Camp

No one says your base of operations must be confined to a single geographic location. Another perfectly acceptable option is to base your campaign around a roving locale, like a nomadic tribal camp or a large merchant caravan. In fact, this approach has several advantages. The base's mobility gives you an excellent opportunity to move the PCs to new parts of the campaign world at your own pace; whenever you have a new area ready to go, it's time for the camp to pull up stakes and move along. Since most roving camps aren't too big, it shouldn't be too difficult to detail the camp and its major NPCs. Also, the basic premise of the wandering base might lead to some pretty entertaining adventures. Once it's ready to move, perhaps the camp encounters an unusual obstacle en route to its next destination. Or perhaps the PCs are dispatched to scout ahead to find a suitable location for the camp to establish itself.

If you select this option, you should spend some time figuring out exactly why the camp moves. Real-world nomads tend to migrate in order to follow game, resources, clement weather, or some combination of the three. For instance, the camp might migrate down into a lush valley every spring to plant crops. Just after harvest, the tribe wanders back up into the mountains to winter amid a collection of natural hotsprings. Of course, you needn't confine yourself to such a mundane explanation. Perhaps the camp is really a train of pilgrims that aims to visit every sacred site on the planet in the course of their lifetimes to atone for some egregious sin. Or perhaps the wandering camp is actually a circus, and the PC characters begin the campaign as performers or part of its crew!

Befitting their migratory nature, wandering camps usually have loose laws and social structures. Sovereignty over the camp is usually decided according to the doctrine of "ascension of the fittest." In other words, anyone who can outfight or outsmart the current leader has the opportunity to become the new leader. Although such groups must generally rely upon volunteer mobs to keep the peace, they usually deal with criminals and sociopaths swiftly and severely. Since resources are often scarce in such camps and survival a challenge, anything that threatens that survival is ruthlessly dispatched.

It's About the Economy

After you've decided upon an appropriate base, there are two important steps you should take to breathe a bit of life into your selection.

Means

First, you should think about the local economy. Basically, this translates into "how do the inhabitants of this area manage to get food and other necessities?" Common models include the following situations:

✔ The residents hunt or grow their own food and trade for other necessities.

✔ The residents produce some important commodity (such as mined ores) or offer some important service (such as expert blacksmithing) and trade for food.

✔ The base is actually "funded" by a wealthy noble responsible for providing all food and necessities. (Strongholds often fall into this category.)

✔ The residents earn their keep through some unusual or "fantastic" means. For example, the base might stretch across a strategic mountain pass, and its residents might impose a large "toll" that travelers pay to traverse the pass. Or, the local gods may have placed the base under their aegis and required their followers to make a pilgrimage to the base to provide its inhabitants with food and necessities.

Some might be tempted to start working up detailed economic models and complex trade schemes. For now, you should remember the First Rule and resist this urge. There will be plenty of time to add such details later; for now, you have more important things to worry about.

Ways

The second step to breathing life into your base is to invent at least one interesting custom or cultural characteristic that sets it apart from anywhere else on the campaign world. Some examples from history and legend include the following situations:

✔ The inhabitants of ancient Sparta were highly-trained warriors who would rather die than surrender.

✔ Ancient Alexandria housed a library that contained a good portion of all the world's knowledge.

✔ King Arthur's legendary court of Camelot was home to the Knights of the Round Table, an order of noble warriors sworn to protect the land and its people.

These are all good examples of the sort of thing you're looking for. Just one simple, unique fact goes a long way toward making the area seem alive in the minds of the PCs. Other possibilities include: a region internationally known for the games it throws annually, a town that houses a holy oracle, or a city in which any violent act is punishable by death.

At this time, it's also a good idea to choose an alignment for the society that dominates your base of operations (see the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*). Since this area is supposed to serve as a place of relative peace and comfort for the PCs, it's recommended that you select one of the "good" alignments, though a base of operations corrupted by "evil" might make an interesting change of pace and challenge.

The Body Politic

Once you've fleshed out your base of operations and local structure, it's time to think about politics and government on the "national level." Since this information isn't likely to directly affect an adventure for some time, you needn't spend much time thinking about this decision, and your choices are quite simple. Your real goal here is to provide the PCs with a single paragraph or so that paints the "big picture" of the world in which they live. Don't worry about the details—you'll fill those in later. For now, you just want to give the PCs the rough idea that they're inhabiting a "big world" comprised of mighty nations. The simplest way to do this is to decide something about the form of government employed by the nation the PCs inhabit and to roughly sketch out a sentence or two describing any of that government's major enemies or allies.

Basically, there are four forms of government likely to dominate most AD&D game worlds.

Despotism

A single "dictator" (perhaps benevolent) makes all decisions for the nation. Because so much of the society is invested in the dictator, the national character is inclined to change suddenly between regimes, and the nation tends to plunge into temporary chaos. Most humanoid tribes are essentially despotic nations.

Monarchy

Like despotism, a single leader makes all decisions for the society. In this case, however, leadership is determined on a hereditary basis, providing continuity and stability to the society between regimes. Typically, monarchies are based upon complex social hierarchies (such as the feudal system of medieval Europe) that help determine the order of succession to the throne. The citizens of some monarchies believe that their royal families are descended from the gods themselves (and since this is a fantasy world, they might just be right).

One noteworthy variation on the monarchy is the city-state. City-states are essentially a collection of tiny independent monarchies (usually based in individual cities) that band together to stand united against larger, foreign nations. Typically, the united entity is governed by some sort of ruling council agreed upon by all the kings.

Republic

Republics invest their power in a large ruling body that theoretically represents the people, such as a senate or a parliament. Usually, the members of this ruling body are elected by a noble class and serve for a set term of office. The ruling body selects a group of executives from among its own ranks to preside over meetings and oversee special governmental functions.

The second step to breathing life into your base is to invent at least one interesting custom or cultural characteristic that sets it apart from anywhere else ...

Anarchy

No national government at all is an interesting option. Such an area is usually a collection of tiny, squabbling local powers and warlords. Anarchies don't often last long since they're ripe picking for any larger, more organized nation that is looking to expand.

Finishing Touches

Once you've chosen an appropriate government type for the PCs' home nation, round things out by inventing one interesting fact about that nation. Possibilities include: something unusual about the nation's ruler, something unusual about the nation's history, a unique custom, or an unusual commodity that can be found in the nation. Then, invent a few other nations (each with its own form of government and interesting fact) to serve as enemies and allies.

Example

Because they are easy to master and develop, I'll choose a stronghold as my base of operations. I imagine that this stronghold sits on the border between a mighty nation and a dark cluster of woods dominated by three rival orc tribes that might threaten that nation if they were ever united. This gives me a good area in which to set my first several adventures.

Befitting the hook I selected for the campaign world last month, the stronghold is actually a collection of fortified towers and platforms built high into the treetops. The only major pathway that leads out of the dark woods and into the great nation actually passes directly beneath the stronghold, giving archers and engineers an excellent field of fire upon an enemy army attempting to overrun the structure. Commanding the garrison of troops that defends the stronghold is an ex-adventurer who now holds the title of Warden of the Black Wood. The Warden was appointed by the nearest noble, a Duke who runs the equivalent of a feudal town about 45 miles away from the stronghold. Though Neutral Good, the Warden is a grim, determined man who is tough on his troops and the residents of the small settlement that shares the treetops. He is worried about the threat posed by the orcs and feels that only by enforcing the strictest discipline can he prepare the area for their inevitable assault.

Economically, the stronghold is divided into two classes that each receive their food and necessities from a different source. The soldiers who make up the garrison receive their food and wages via supply caravans dispatched weekly by the nearby Duke. The townsfolk, on the other hand, survive mainly by offering goods and services to the many drifters who stop at the stronghold on their way out to the black woods and beyond. Most of these drifters are adventurers or trappers who collect pelts from the exotic wildlife that lives in the murky woods.

As for a unique characteristic that distinguishes the stronghold, I've decided that it's known for the eerie wailing noise that can be heard echoing through its surrounding forests at night. The noise is a complete mystery (even to myself, at present); no one knows what produces it or where it comes from.

Now that I've created some important details about the campaign world, the Second Rule compels me to invent an appropriate secret based on these details. Looking back over last month's column gives me an interesting idea. Suppose that a fairly sizable cluster of the woods surrounding the stronghold is actually comprised of an army of elderly treants whom the plant goddess has ordered to take root and guard a sacred spot located near the hold. From time to time, some of these treants wander a bit, shifting the course of several of the minor paths that crisscross the area. Of course, only the most skilled foresters understand that the paths actually move; most people who try to negotiate the area simply believe the paths are unbelievably confusing. Let's further suppose that according to local legends, several decades ago, a great general was somehow able to bypass the stronghold (which was once originally held by one of the orc tribes) to launch a surprise attack into the black woods. No one knows how he could have accomplished this feat, so most people don't believe in the legend. But the legend is true. The general skirted the stronghold by discovering the secret of the treants and convincing enough of them to move aside to form a second path through the forest large enough to accommodate an army. This secret has several interesting opportunities for future adventures: the PCs can discover the secret of the treants, they can discover exactly what the goddess has deployed the treants to protect, and—if the stronghold is ever temporarily captured by the orcs—they might duplicate the general's legendary feat to reclaim it.

Finally, turning my attention to politics on the national level, I've decided the nation that maintains the stronghold is a feudal monarchy. Its interesting fact is that its kings, on their fortieth birthday, have always been known to bid their friends and family farewell and venture into the black woods alone, never to return. No one knows why they observe this ritual. Obviously, a future adventure might give the PCs an opportunity to get to the bottom of this mystery. In accordance with the Second Rule, I've decided that the ritual has something to do with a price the royal family agreed to pay to forestall some terrible calamity, though I'm not going to develop it any further at this point.

In addition to the large, uncivilized black wood, I've decided that three nations border my feudal kingdom. One is an enemy under the despotic rule of an evil Wizard. Its interesting fact is that the Wizard's palace is set amid a clump of woods that continuously rages with fire. The second is a republic of elves that sometimes serves as an uneasy ally to the feudal king. These elves are believed to be the first inhabitants of the planet and know a great many secrets. The third nation is a second feudal monarchy dominated by isolationists. Its rulers have gained an impressive knowledge of genetics which they use to selectively breed the members of the nation's noble houses. As a result, most of the nation's nobles are are almost superhumanly strong and intelligent.

Join me in thirty days for "World Building, Part III," where we'll tackle religion and finish everything we need to do before drawing our first maps.

Ray Winninger has been a professional game designer for fifteen years. He's wanted to write this column for at least twelve of those years.

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By Skip Williams

This month, the Sage makes a brief stop to examine some AD&D® game mechanics before moving on to consider the workings of various spells and magical items. This month's excursion also includes a trip to the Marvel Super Heroes™ *Adventure Game.*

If a newly created player character doesn't spend a proficiency slot on any modern language, can the character speak any type of language? Do new characters receive an extra proficiency to spend on at least one language?

Every character begins play knowing his native tongue (see *PH*, Chapter 2, under the Languages heading). For humans, this is the "Common" tongue, or the character's national or regional language (if the DM has created any). For demihumans, this is the character's racial tongue. In either case, the character doesn't have to do anything special to learn his native language—it's free. Characters cannot give up this ability to gain a slot to spend elsewhere.

Since a roll of "1" on the d20 for an attack or saving throw is always a failure, is a roll of "1" on the d10 roll for surprise always a surprise, even for characters with high Dexterity scores?

Technically, no. The result of the surprise roll must be a 3 or less. Even so, a high Dexterity score doesn't make a character immune to surprise, as there are all sorts of cases in which characters suffer penalties to surprise rolls. For example, many monsters impose penalties to opponents' surprise rolls, and Table 57 in the *DMG* lists several common surprise modifiers.

Since a roll of "1" on the d20 for an attack or saving throw is always a failure, is a roll of "1" on the d10 for surprise always a surprise ... ?

On the other hand, you could impose a house rule that says a roll of "1" always equals surprise. Just be sure that you don't require a surprise roll at all in cases where a character obviously knows trouble is coming.

I hope you haven't been asked this a dozen times already. When characters are completely underwater, without the aid of *free action*, is their initiative penalty +6 (from Table 40 in the *DMG*) or +4 (from the Underwater Combat section of Chapter 9 in the *DMG*)? Also, do either of these initiative penalties apply to spellcasting, movement, etc., or just melee combat?

Don't worry, you're the first to ask.

According to *Of Ships and the Sea*, the initiative penalty for land-based characters fighting underwater is +4 (though there could be situations during an underwater adventure in which the +6 penalty could apply instead). This penalty applies no matter what actions a character takes in a round.

Does a *yo-yo of fate* allow the +1 to any 1d20 roll for any character the possessor wants? Or is it only for the possessor? How often can the *yo-yo* be used?

A *yo-yo of fate* works only for the person carrying it and then only if that person is a Jester (Bard kit). The saving throw boost and +2% bonus to Jester abilities that the *yo-yo* provides work continuously and automatically. The power to alter fate (in the form of bonuses to d20 rolls) works only once per day, as the owner desires. The owner can gain a bigger bonus than +1, but each +1 shortens the *yo-yo's* string by one inch, and the *yo-yo* can never provide a bonus larger than the string's length in inches.

Just how much of a slain character do you need to successfully *raise* or *resurrect* the character? Do you need a piece taken from the body at the time of

death? Any piece? For example, will a *resurrection* spell work on a character who fell into a pool of lava and died, leaving only a tuft of hair? If a character leaves a fingernail clipping at a temple, can the Priests there *resurrect* the character if she dies and the body isn't recovered?

For a *raise dead* spell, you need the whole body (though the spell still works if the body is missing something the character can live without).

For a *resurrection* spell, you need a piece of the body that was part of the body at the time of death. Hair or nail clippings (or anything else) taken before the fact don't work, though a tuft of hair left behind after a fatal event is sufficient.

If an opponent uses a wrestling attack on a character who has received a *stoneskin* spell, what are the results? I would assume that the wrestling attack removes a charge from the *stoneskin* but inflicts no damage.

A wrestling attack removes a *stoneskin* charge and inflicts damage; the spell doesn't stop damage from constriction or wrestling.

Can a spellcaster cast a spell if held in a grappling attack? Can the attacker use the "manipulate" lock effect (from the *Combat & Tactics* book) to stop the spellcaster from speaking, thus negating spells with a verbal component? Can the spellcaster use a wand or other magical item while held?

Characters cannot cast spells or use spell-like effects from magical items while grappled. An attacker who has the character grappled doesn't need to do anything special to interfere with spellcasting or magical item use other than maintain the grapple. This is true even if the caster tries a spell with only a verbal component; an attacker who has the character in his grip can easily thwart the attempt.

One of the player characters in my group has a *scimitar of speed*. According to the rules on page 69 of the *Combat & Tactics* book, the *scimitar* has a speed of very fast, and the wielder always wins initiative if he declares a combat action that involves an attack with the *scimitar*. On page 18 of the same book, it says that when the character makes an attack, his action phase is his base initiative or weapon speed, whichever is later. So, if the character's base initiative is fast, when does he attack with a *scimitar of speed*? In the very fast phase or in the fast phase? Does a spell cast in the very fast phase have any chance to go before the weapon strikes? When the *scimitar of speed* wielder decides to charge with the *scimitar*, does he begin the charge in the very fast phase or the fast phase?

I'm not very happy with the *C&T* text on the *scimitar of speed*. Here's how I suggest you handle a *scimitar of speed* under the *C&T* rules:

The weapon strikes first in the very fast phase regardless of the initiative roll or the wielder's base phase. This first strike can be a charge. (The *scimitar* makes the wielder speedy.)

The wielder must use his normal initiative roll to see who goes first on subsequent phases. Certain other magical items, such as *boots of striding and springing*, use the wielder's initiative roll to determine what the wielder can do with them each round.

If a character uses the *nondetection* spell, can things like *glyphs of warding* or *alarm* spells detect him and go off? Does any similar warding spell work against the character? Is the effect the same for similar items such as an *amulet of proof against detection and location*?

The *nondetection* spell allows the recipient a saving throw against most Divination spells but has no effect against warding spells. Most warding spells are Abjurations, not Divinations. Also, warding spells do not detect anything; they simply go off whenever something meets their triggering conditions. An *amulet of proof against detection and location* also has no effect on warding spells. Note that a *nondetection* effect also does not interfere with creatures with the innate ability to detect invisible creatures, such as hell hounds or *Mordenkainen's faithful hounds*. A *nondetection* effect interferes with a creature's spell-like Divination abilities.

The *Storm's spell thrust* spell (originally found in the *Seven Sisters* book), allows the caster to force spell effects back at their casters. How close to a spell effect must the caster be to thrust it back?

The caster of *Storm's spell thrust* must either be the target of a spell, or at least within the spell's area of effect, before she can thrust it back.

Can a weapon treated with a *dimensional blade* spell cut through flesh? If so, how does the attack work? Does it cause some kind of automatic critical hit?

Are death knights subject to damage from their own fireball spells?

A *dimensional blade* can cut flesh and harm creatures, but its effect is not as spectacular as you might expect. The weapon ignores armor (but not Dexterity or magical bonuses) and gains an additional +2 attack and damage bonus. Any Strength bonuses the wielder normally enjoys become irrelevant while the effect lasts.

I was under the impression that undead do not tire. If this is so, how do undead spellcasters such as liches or spectral wizards feel the effects of the channeling spellcasting system in the *Spells & Magic* book?

Undead spellcasters feel the effects of channeling the same as any other caster. It's fine to assume undead don't feel normal fatigue. Channeling, however, represents direct strain on a being's essence.

Are death knights subject to damage from their own *fireball* spells? If so,

Marvel Super Heroes Questions

The hindrances section for Threnody in the *X-Men Roster Book* says she has the Legacy Virus, but the history section says she was apparently cured. Does this mean she was somehow cured of the Legacy Virus, or does it refer to her psi-bafflers?

Neither, but I can understand your confusion. The Legacy Virus can cause the uncontrolled release of a mutant's powers, and Threnody's psi-bafflers prevent that for her Energy Conversion powers. In any case, the character has been infected with Legacy Virus. She might or she might not have been cured of the affliction (Marvel has not yet revealed whether she has been cured). For now, Threnody is prone to Strength and Agility reductions from the virus, as noted in her character entry.

How much damage does a fall inflict?

To calculate damage from a fall, determine the distance of the fall in feet and divide by ten. (The distances sidebar on page 35 of the Game Book might be helpful here.) Multiply that result by the material strength of whatever the hero hits at the end of the fall. *The Reed Richards Guide to Everything*, which should be released by the time you read this, has more information on falling.

Just how strong does a hero have to be to throw something? How far can you throw something?

A hero can pick up and throw anything with a Material Strength equal to or less than his Strength score. (See the sidebar on page 60 of the Game Book.) Thrown items can only hit targets at firing distance (except by accident or by virtue of some heretofore unrevealed power or skill). It's possible to attempt a Strength action to gain extra distance; throwing an object out to visual distance is a *daunting Strength* action. Throwing something into orbit is a *cosmic Strength* action. In either case, the hero has no real control over where the object lands.

If you play a Doom card in the action phase of an exchange, can the Narrator use it against you in the counteraction phase of the same exchange? If you give up a Doom card as a result of being wounded, does the card go into the discard pile or into the Doom Bank?

All Doom Cards played during a phase go into the Doom Bank at the end of that phase (not the end of the exchange), even when played to satisfy wounds. Since cards don't go into the Doom Bank until the end of the phase, the Narrator cannot use Doom Cards during the same phase in which they are played, but once a card is in the Doom Bank, the Narrator can use it anytime.

Say a hero with a Strength of 8 has the Boxing skill. If the hero chooses to make a contingent attack, are the two attacks resolved with Strength 8 or Strength 4? Does the player use one card or two?

If the hero uses the Boxing skill to make two attacks, he plays one card (bonuses for edge and trump apply), then divides the whole action score between the two attacks. Both of these attacks could be contingent attacks, or the Narrator might allow the hero one normal attack and one contingent attack. The card play is the same in either case. If the hero makes a normal attack at full value, however, she cannot then use the Boxing skill for a contingent attack in the same exchange.

Some of the published characters seem to be in violation of the rules. The Hulk has +20 body armor, for instance, and both Spiral and the Black Queen have magic intensities that exceed their Willpower scores. Are these things legal for player-created heroes?

Actually, the Hulk doesn't have +20 body armor; he has a defense rating equal to his current Strength rating. (That's why there's no "+" in the Hulk's body armor entry.) Nevertheless, the Hulk's Strength could be 20 or more. Many published characters violate the rules for creating player heroes. These are all characters with long and well-established histories in the Marvel universe. The hero creation rules were not written with these characters in mind; they generate heroes of something less than Celestial rank who are at the beginnings of their careers. Barring future rules expansions or changes in the rules, player-created heroes cannot exceed the limits currently set for them.

does their magic resistance apply? If it does, what happens if the roll is low enough to make the *fireball* rebound? Do they suffer double damage?

As a general rule, a creature's magic resistance doesn't apply to spells it casts on itself. The DM can make an exception if a caster happens to be caught in one of its own spell effects when it was targeted elsewhere. I'm inclined to suggest that you allow a death knight a magic resistance roll if it is caught in its own *fireball* blast. If the resistance roll fails, the blast has its normal effect (the death knight still receives a saving throw). If the roll succeeds, the death knight is unaffected by the blast. In this case, ignore the rebound effect if it occurs.

Is it possible to substitute a lower level spell for a higher level spell slot? For example, a character who anticipates an encounter with an aboleth might want to take an extra *cure serious wounds* (4th level) instead of a *cure critical wounds* (5th level) because *cure serious wounds* can counter the aboleth's skin transformation attack, and the higher-level spell won't.

In the core AD&D game, you can't switch around spell slots. (The optional spell-point system in the *Spells & Magic* book eliminates spell slots altogether.)

In the case of aboleth's skin transforming ability, I suggest you allow any healing spell of 4th-level or higher (namely *cure serious wounds*, *cure critical wounds*, and *heal*) to remove the affliction once it sets in. Note that *cure disease* stops the transformation if the victim receives it before the transformation is complete.

How does the plane travel power from a *book of the planes* supposed to work? Can the reader go anywhere on the destination plane? Is the trip instantaneous? Can the reader take other characters along?

Once a character reads a chapter in a *book of the planes*, the character can instantly transport himself and up to 550 lbs. of other material to the plane described in the chapter. The character can only reach the plane's "top" layer.

How many spells in a character's memory can be affected by the *draincone* spell? Also, once *draincone* drains a spell, is there any limitation on when the *draincone* caster can use the power boost the spell provides?

A *draincone* affects only spells that have been cast already. This includes existing spell effects and spells that have been cast for a delayed effect, such as *fire trap, explosive runes, glyph of warding,* and the like.

The *draincone* caster can use the energy from a disrupted spell for one of her own spells only if she casts that spell immediately after the *draincone* destroys a spell effect.

What is the correct area of effect for the Torm spell *swordward* (from the *Faiths & Avatars* book)? The book lists the area as 5 to 60 square feet (pretty small), but the spell description mentions the *blade barrier* spell, whose area of effect is 5 to 60 feet square. Also, the spell description says any Lawful Good being within the area of effect gains hit points equal to the amount of damage it inflicts. Is there any limit? Or can a *hasted* and *enlarged* Paladin really gain 200 hit points with this spell?

The area of effect for the *swordward* spell is 5 feet square (25 square feet) to 60 feet square (3,600 square feet). If you take a look at the *blade barrier* spell description, you'll discover a similar error.

An *enlarged* and *hasted* Paladin sure could gain a lot more than 200 hit points from this spell, particularly if the Paladin was high level.

All the damage an affected creature inflicts is returned to the creature as bonus hit points. The total can exceed the creature's normal maximum. Though the spell description is not clear on the point, I heartily recommend that these bonus hit points last only so long as the affected creatures remain in the spell's area of effect—they go away immediately when the spell ends or the creatures leave the area of effect. If a creature leaves the area of effect and enters again, the bonus hit points don't return, but the creature can begin accumulating them again.

While the creature has any bonus hit points, however, any damage it suffers is subtracted from the bonus hit points first.

Skip Williams admits that he was lousy in math while in school, but he seems to have gained a better understanding of numerous mathematical concepts from playing; running, and writing about roleplaying games.

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Some while ago, at Your Majesty's request, I gladly sent you the history of the English Church and People which I had recently completed, in order that you might read it and give it your approval. I now send it once again to be transcribed, so that Your Majesty may consider it at greater leisure.

—Bede, in opening his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Dark Ages

Roleplaying in Anglo-Saxon Britain

by Ian Malcomson

illustrated by Mark Zug

The historical AD&D® game supplements cover many periods, but not the heroic age of the British Isles. Here, then, are rules for setting a campaign in the British Dark Ages, the period beginning approximately one hundred years after the withdrawal of Rome from British shores and ending with the succession of William the Conqueror.

A detailed look at the history and cultures of the Dark Ages would require much more space than is available here. DMs and players interested in more information will find a great resource in the local library or the World Wide Web. A bibliography of related works appears at the close of this article, but Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is the greatest influence. Originally written in the eighth century, this venerable book has been the mainstay of all scholars of Anglo-Saxon history for centuries.

Disclaimer: Although much of the following material is based on accepted historical fact, certain assumptions and changes have been made to integrate the material with the AD&D game. In addition, information pertaining to religion presents a fantasy translation of the faiths existing in the Dark Ages. The views expressed by the author are meant to provide the reader with a game resource and should not be taken as commentary on any religion.

The British Isles of the Dark Ages

In 410 A.D., *the Roman forces that had occupied Britain since 43 A.D. withdrew from the Isles as part of the attempt to halt the downward spiral of the Empire. This retreat left Britain open and largely defenseless against the Germanic pirates of Northern Europe, who were poised to attack what was one of the richest jewels in the Roman Empire's crown.*

Piratical raids by the Germanic tribes foreshadowed a full-scale invasion around 449 A.D. The Jutes, Angles, and Saxons came to the Isles in force, with the sole aim of wresting control of the richest regions of Britain from its Romano-Celtic inhabitants. An age of war began in the Isles, one that was virtually unrelenting for over four centuries, as the Germanic invaders first fought the Britons, then each other, then themselves faced invasion at the hands of the Danes and the Vikings.

The backdrop to an Anglo-Saxon campaign is one of almost constant war, as kings fight kings, and pirates and raiders battle anyone with something worth taking. Add to this the progression of the Pagan Anglo-Saxons into Christianity, and you have a campaign setting with elements of warfare, political and religious intrigue, and the constant quest for more power and influence by the nobility—toward the holy grail that was the position of King of All England.

Player Character Races

An Anglo-Saxon campaign is more human orientated than a typical AD&D® game setting. Although traditional demihuman races (dwarves and elves) appear in Anglo-Saxon mythology, they were strange, fey creatures of the spirit world. A common Anglo-Saxon peasant would react to the appearance of an elf as he would to seeing a ghost. This does not prevent players from choosing nonhuman races, but the number of such characters should be limited to preserve the mystery that surrounds them.

Human PC Races

The following pages provide notes for DMs and players alike. Special focus is, of course, given to the Anglo-Saxons, who were the dominant human group of the Dark Ages. Information on other human cultures is also provided, and further material for the AD&D game can be found in the historical sourcebooks (especially HR1 *Vikings* and HR3 *Celts*).

Ability Score Modifiers: A few of the following human cultures gain bonuses to their initial ability scores, but all humans remain limited by the normal ability score ranges provided in the *Player's Handbook*. Thus, no penalty can reduce an ability score below 3, and no bonus can raise it above 18.

Anglo-Saxons

"Anglo-Saxon" here refers to the three main Germanic tribes that participated in the invasion of Britain: the Saxons, the Jutes, and the Angles.

The Anglo-Saxons invaded the eastern shores of Britain, gradually subduing the Britons, who had been stripped of their protective force in the form of the Roman Legions. From 449 A.D., the Britons lost such major battles as Aylesford (455), Deorham (577), and Fethanleag (584). The Germanic advance was, however, checked for roughly fifty years by their defeat at the hands of a Briton general, Ambrosius Aurelianus, a *dux bellorum*, or "commander in wars," at the Battle of Mount Badon in 516 A.D. This general, who died on the field at the Battle of Camlann in 537 A.D., remains the best candidate for the historical model of the legends of King Arthur.

Anglo-Saxons are standard AD&D humans with respect to ability score adjustments, height, weight, and age. Anglo-Saxon hair color ranges from mid-brown through sandy blonde. Eye color varies among brown, hazel, gray, and blue.

Anglo-Saxon characters can attain any level as Fighters, Rangers, Priests, or Thieves. They are limited to 14th level as Wizards, using the Runemaster kit. They also enjoy unlimited

A Brief Timeline for the Dark Ages

410 Roman legions withdrawn from the British Isles.
446 The "Groans of the Britons"—unsuccessful appeal by the Britons for aid against Saxon raids.
449 Germanic invasion of Britain begins. Hengist and Horsa found Kent.
455 Jutes defeat Votigern's Britons. Horsa slain.
477 Aelle founds Sussex.
495 Cerdic and Cynric found Wessex.
516 Battle of Mount Badon. Britons, under Ambrosius Aurelianus, check Saxons for many years.
526 Kingdoms of Essex and Mercia founded.
547 Ida founds Bernicia.
560 Aella founds Deira.
588 Ethelric unites Bernicia and Deira, forming kingdom of Northumbria.
598 St. Augustine sent to Kent by Gregory the Great, converts Ethelbert, and becomes first Archbishop of Canterbury.
626 Penda becomes king of Mercia.
627 Edwin of Northumbria is Christianized by Paulinus, who becomes first Archbishop of York.
633 Battle of Heathfield. Penda slays Edwin of Northumbria, in alliance with Caedwalla, a Welsh king.
634 Battle of Heavenfield. Oswald retakes Northumbria and slays Caedwalla.
642 Oswald defeated and slain by Penda.
655 Penda defeated and slain by Oswy.
664 Synod of Whitby. Debate between Celtic and Roman Christian Churches. Oswy finds for the Roman Church.
731 Completion of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History.*
733 Ethalbald of Mercia becomes overlord of Wessex, Sussex, Essex, and Kent.
740 Ethalbald becomes overlord of East Anglia.
757 Offa becomes king of Mercia and England.
777 Offa defeats Cynewulf of Wessex.
825 Egbert of Wessex defeats West Welsh (in Cornwall), Mercia, and Kent. Essex submits.
829 Egbert conquers Mercia.
865 "Great Army" of Danes under Ingwar and Hubba in East Anglia.
867 Danes capture York and overthrow the kingdom of Northumbria.
871 Danes invade Wessex. Ethelred I dies soon after the Battle of Marden; Alfred the Great becomes king.
878 Danes under Guthrum attack Wessex. Alfred defeated at the Battle of Chippenham, and is forced to flee. Alfred defeats Guthrum at the Battle of Ethandum. Treaty of Wedmore between Alfred and Guthrum. Guthrum Christianized. Danes are allowed to settle in East Anglia.
899 Death of Alfred the Great. Succeeded by Edward the Elder.
916 Edward recovers Eastern Mercia and East

advancement as Bards, subject to the Storyteller kit.

Anglo-Saxons may become dual-classed, as per the rules in the *Player's Handbook*. However, they may not dual-class in any combination involving either the Bard (Storyteller) or Wizard (Runemaster) classes.

Anglo-Saxon Society: The Anglo-Saxon community was basically rural, with all levels of society living off the land. This made land the greatest of commodities, and the quest for more land is largely responsible for most wars during the period.

Men were both warriors and craftsmen-farmers. Their responsibilities were divided between service to their community (in the form of craftsmanship and maintenance of the land) and service to the *fyrd* (the army, pronounced "feared"). Each man, with the exception of the *theow* (slaves), was expected to keep and maintain his own armor and weaponry, for use when called into the ranks of the fyrd.

The Anglo-Saxon social hierarchy went as follows:

Bretwalda—*High king.* The position of bretwalda distinguishes between petty and great kings. A bretwalda not only ruled his own domain but also held influence over all or part of neighboring kingdoms.

King—*The ruler of a kingdom.* Kingship, in Anglo-Saxon society, was relative. The rulers of minor kingdoms, for example, could not hope to approach the prestige or influence owned by the great bretwaldas, but he could perhaps contend, politically and in war, with a neighboring king of equal or lesser station.

Aethling—*The princes and would-be kings.* These individuals had common ancestry with the king and held the right of succession to the throne. They had special responsibilities, including military command. Being aethling, however, did not guarantee succession. The *witan*, a council of leaders formed of the eoldermen, had the power to select the best individual for the position of king from the ranks of the aethling.

Eolderman *(ul-dur-man)*—*The nobility.* Responsible for administration of regions of land, and the people therein, and for the mustering of the fyrd. Eoldermen also formed the nucleus of the witan. In the tenth century, the upper ranks of the eoldermen became known as *eorls*, forming, with the bishops and archbishops of a kingdom, the high witan.

Thegn *(thane)*—*Warriors, forming the backbone of the Anglo-Saxon military.* Good service from a thegn could be rewarded with riches, land, and promotion into the ranks of the eoldermen. All thegns were in service as professional warriors to the eoldermen or the king himself. The king's thegns were synonymous with the knights of later periods, and they were land-holders occasionally called to sit in the witan.

Ceorl *(kurl)*—*Free men.* They administrated regions within the domains of the eoldermen. It is from the ranks of the ceorls that the fyrd was mustered. There were three ranks of ceorl: *geneatas*, who paid rent for their land to their eolderman, and who were responsible for the maintenance of that land and any fortifications, farms, and so forth that existed on it; the *kotsetla*, who performed tasks for the geneatas in return for general freedom and living; and the *gebur*, peasants who were totally dependent on their lord and whose lives were dominated by labor. Ceorls could, through good service, rise to the rank of thegn but could not become eoldermen.

Theow *(thow)*—*The lowest social rank in Anglo-Saxon society, the theow were slaves and bondsmen.* They were not permitted to the ranks of the fyrd, but were allowed to own property, could expect food and shelter from their lord, and could earn money in their spare time. In this, the theow were more privileged than the slaves of most societies.

Celts

During the Anglo-Saxon period, the people of Wales and Ireland were still of Celtic stock. With few exceptions, however, the old Celtic culture and religion had been replaced by Christianity and a society in which kings, not priests, were the dominant force.

More information on using Celts in a campaign can be found in the AD&D historical sourcebook, HR3 *Celts*.

The Celts of the Dark Ages had learned well from their experiences as neighbors to a major Roman province.

Anglia from the Danes.
919 Edward receives the homage of all the northern kings.
924 Death of Edward the Elder. Elfward, then Athelstan, succeeds him.
937 Battle of Brunanburh. Athelstan defeats a combined force of Scots, Danes, and Northumbrians.
939 Death of Athelstan. Edmund I succeeds him.
946 Edmund I murdered by Leofa, an exiled thief. Edred becomes king.
947 Erik Bloodaxe defeats Edred and takes Northumbria.
954 Edred defeats and slays Erik Bloodaxe.
955 Death of Edred. Edwy becomes king.
957 Mercia and Northumbria renounce Edwy in favor of Edgar.
959 Edwy dies. Edgar sole king.
973 Edgar becomes "Emperor of Britain."
975 Edgar dies. Succeeded by Edward the Martyr.
978 Edward is murdered. Ethelred II The Unready becomes king.
991 Battle of Maldon. Ethelred II buys off the Danes—instigation of Danegeld tax.
1002 Ethelred II marries Emma, daughter of Richard, Duke of Normandy. Massacre of the Danes on November 13 (St. Brice's Day).
1013 Sweyn Forkbeard invades England. Ethelred II flees to Normandy. England conquered by Danes.
1014 Sweyn Forkbeard dies. Succeeded by Canute. Ethelred II returns. Struggle for the throne begins.
1016 Ethelred II dies. Saxons choose Edmund Ironside as king. England partitioned, but Edmund dies, leaving Canute the sole king.
1035 Death of Canute. Hardicanute (Harold I Harefoot) becomes regent, with Harthacanute disposed defending Denmark from Norway.
1037 Harold I Harefoot becomes king of England.
1040 Harold I dies. Harthacanute becomes king.
1042 Harthacanute dies. Succeeded by Edward the Confessor.
1051 Earl Godwin of Wessex exiled for anti-Norman views. Edward promises the throne of England to William, Duke of Normandy.
1053 Death of Godwin. Harold becomes Earl of Wessex.
1066 Death of Edward (January 6). Harold claims the throne as Harold II. Harold II defeats Norwegian invasion at Stamford Bridge (September 25). William invades England to claim the throne. Harold II defeated at the Battle of Hastings (October 14). William I becomes king. Beginning of the Norman Conquest.

Kings & Heroes of the Dark Ages

Alfred the Great (LG hm F17). Aethling of Wessex, 849 to 871; king of Wessex, 871 to 901. The son of Ethelwulf, Alfred succeeded his brother, Ethelred of Wessex, in 871, during a period of continued Danish aggression. In 878, the Danes had completely overrun Wessex, forcing Alfred to flee. Disguising himself as a harper, Alfred entered the camp of King Guthrum of the Danes and ascertained the weaknesses of Guthrum's forces. In May, 878, Alfred led his forces against the Danes at Edington, Wiltshire. Alfred's success in this battle forced the Danes to sue for peace. Later, he drove the Danes from London and destroyed the Danish invasion fleet.

Alfred allowed the Danes already in England to remain under a set of terms known as the Peace of Wedmere. These terms allowed the Danes to remain within the kingdom of East Anglia and insisted that they embrace Christianity. After his success against the Danes, all outside East Anglia recognized Alfred as king of all England.

Alfred was an organized and scholarly king. He established laws, promoted learning and literacy in his people, and caused many Latin manuscripts to be translated into English. He himself translated the *Psalms*, *Aesop's Fables*, and *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, as well as consolidating early records to form the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Alfred was also devoutly Christian, having twice journeyed to Rome to visit the Pope in his youth.

Alfred's descendants ruled England until 1066.

Ambrosius Aurelianus (LN hm F18). Roman commander of the Britons against the Saxons; c.493 to c.537. Ambrosius, according to Bede, was the last remaining Roman noble in England at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. He led his people in many battles, including the great Battle of Badon Hill in 516, which halted the Anglo-Saxon invasion for many years. Although no hard evidence exists to connect Ambrosius with the legend of King Arthur, he nonetheless remains the most likely historical candidate for the basis of the mythology surrounding Arthur and his court.

Augustine, St. (LN hm P17[Roman Church]). Roman missionary; first archbishop of Canterbury; 598 to 604. Augustine was sent by Gregory the Great as a missionary to Kent, where he succeeded in converting King Ethelbert to the Roman Church in 598. He established the archbishopric of Canterbury and was, in his time, the most important figure of the Roman Church in England.

Bede (NG hm P10[Roman Church]). Priest and historian of Jarrow; b.673, d.739. A highly influential chronicler, Bede was born on land owned by the monastery of Wearmouth and, at the age of seven, came under the tutelage of its abbot, Benedict Biscop. He was ordained as a deacon at the age of nineteen by John, Bishop of Hexham, and became a priest by the age of thirty. During his time, he compiled many writings, including Latin grammars, books of computistics and chronology, history, and commentaries on the Bible.

His most famous work, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, presents the most concise and readable history of England from Gaius Julius Caesar's first expedition in 54 B.C., to the *History's* completion in 731. It remains perhaps the most important contemporary historical source for the period. The *History* and his other works gained Bede much renown, but he never saw himself as anything but a humble servant of God.

Beowulf (CG hm R20). Legendary king of the Geats, slayer of Grendel. Beowulf is an important figure in the legends of the Anglo-Saxons. The story dates back to before the Anglo-Saxon invasion and is the oldest known writing in the English language. He was the king of the Geats, a Germanic tribal people who dwelled north of the lands of the Danes.

After his battles with Grendel and its mother, Beowulf returned to his own lands, eventually becoming king. He ruled for fifty years, until his lands became threatened by a dragon. Once more, the hero-king of the Geats faced the monster, but this time, although he managed to slay the beast, he was mortally wounded as well.

Edgar (LN hm F14). King ("Emperor") of England; reigned from 957 to 975. Edgar was the second son of Edmund I and became king of Northumbria and Mercia when the northern nobles, dissatisfied by the rule of his brother Edwy, transferred their allegiance to him. In 973, he was crowned Emperor of England in a ceremony conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Bath. During this year, he was supposedly rowed on the River Dee by several kings, including Malcolm of Strathclyde, Kenneth II of the Scots, Maccus of the Isle of Man, and a handful of Welsh kings, as an act of subservience.

Edgar was a pious king and patronized Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, who led a reformation of the Church with his king's backing. Laws were introduced that punished those who did not pay taxes due to the Church, and some forty abbeys were founded during his reign.

Edgar also reformed the more material aspects of his realm, codifying English law and clarifying the borders of the Shires. He struck a new coinage and gave license to certain towns to mint it.

Edgar's sons were Edward the Martyr, Ethelred II "The Unready," and Edmund the Aetheling.

Edmund I (LN hm F16). King of England; reigned from 939 to 946. Succeeding his half-brother Ethelstan, Edmund I led his people in battle against the Norse king Olaf II, reclaiming much of England lost during Ethelstan's reign. He also subdued the Briton kingdom of Strathclyde, bestowing it to Malcolm I, king of the Scots, to secure the Anglo-Scottish border.

Edmund I was murdered by Leofa, an exiled thief, during the Feast of St. Augustine (26th of May) at Pucklechurch and buried at Glastonbury.

Guthrum (N hm F17). King of East Anglia; reigned from 880 to 890. A Danish commander who attacked Wessex in 878, Guthrum was the nemesis of Alfred the Great. After battling with Alfred, Guthrum was eventually forced to agree to the Treaty of Wedmore, which required him and his men to embrace Christianity. They were baptized in the River Aller in Somerset.

After Guthrum had honored the Treaty, Alfred allowed him to remain in England, bestowing the kingdom of East Anglia, which Guthrum ruled from Cirencester until his death.

Oswy (LG hm F17). King of Northumbria; reigned from 651 to 670. Oswy's reign saw his kingdom reach the zenith of its power. He was originally the king of Bernicia but managed to unite the northern kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira into the single nation of Northumbria by assassinating Oswin, his nephew and the king of Deira.

His greatest victory, however, was over the mighty Penda of Mercia in 655. He fought Penda and several of his subject-kings on the flooded River Winwaed (near Leeds), slaying the pagan Mercian king and becoming bretwalda.

In 664, Oswy presided over the Synod of Whitby, the meeting that was to decide for either the Celtic or Roman Christian churches to be the single form of Christianity followed in England.

Penda (LE hm F20). King of Mercia; reigned from 626 to 655. A powerful, warlike, pagan king, Penda established Mercian supremacy by defeating the West Saxons in 628, then the all-powerful Edwin of Northumbria at Heathfield in 633 with the aid of Cadwallon, king of Gwynedd.

Under Penda, the Mercians evolved from tribe to kingdom, rapidly becoming powerful through the fear they inspired in their enemies. He seems to have had special enmity for the kingdom of Northumbria, first annihilating Edwin's army, then carrying out destructive raids against Oswy's people until he was slain by Oswy during an attempted invasion.

Bede writes extensively about Penda in his *Ecclesiastical History*, from the death of Edwin (II, 20), to Oswy's victory (III, 24), portraying him as an antihero.

Thus, they add +1 to their initial Wisdom scores. However, the age of mighty Celtic warriors was past, and most Celts of adventuring classes are scholarly in nature. Thus, they suffer a –1 penalty to initial Strength scores.

Celts were shorter than their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries, so height is determined by using a base of 56" (55" for females), adding the result of 2d10 to this base. Likewise, weight is generated by rolling 6d10 and adding the result to 130 lbs. (94 lbs. for females).

Celts had reddish to black hair and green to hazel eyes. They had darker complexions than their Anglo-Saxon neighbors.

Celts are unlimited in their advancement as Fighters, Rangers, Priests, Thieves, Bards, or Mages. Owners of *The Complete Bard's Handbook* or the 1st Edition *Player's Handbook* are encouraged to use the dual-classed Bard class presented therein in place of the standard AD&D Bard described in the 2nd Edition *Player's Handbook*.

By the Dark Ages, no Druids remained in Celtic society. All Celtic Priests use either the missionary role or the Scholar Monk kit, with Celtic Christianity as their faith.

Celtic characters may dual-class normally, as per the rules in the *Player's Handbook*.

Picts

The Picts of what is now Scotland remained a minor irritation to the northern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms throughout the Dark Ages. Minor, that is, since those who bore the brunt of warfare with the highland barbarians were the Briton and Celtic kingdoms that neighbored them. It was not unknown, however, for Anglo-Saxon and Briton kings to employ Picts as mercenaries, although such mercenaries were seen by the Anglo-Saxons as being secondary to the fyrd.

Picts were strong and hardy. They lived in the coldest regions of the British Isles and could continue to war even in the depths of winter. Therefore, they receive a +1 bonus to initial Strength and Constitution scores. They were not great learners or scholars, though, and accordingly receive a –1 penalty to both initial Intelligence and Wisdom.

Picts should be considered standard AD&D humans for height and weight determination. They generally have dark brown to black hair and hazel to brown eyes. Their complexions lie between those possessed by Celts and those of the Anglo-Saxons.

Picts are unlimited in advancement in the Fighter, Ranger, and Thief classes. They may become Priests but are limited to 9th level, using the Tribal Priest kit. They may not become Mages or Bards.

When dual-classing, Picts are limited to combinations of Fighter and Thief.

Britons

The Celtic peoples of Britain, although afforded the freedom of the Roman Empire, were still seen as secondary to Roman citizens. They did benefit from Roman learning and technology, but that still gave them little hope of safety when the Legions left and the Anglo-Saxons arrived.

The Britons, at the time of the initial invasions by the Anglo-Saxons, were a fairly advanced civilization, more than the Celts of Wales and Ireland. Without the Romans, though, they were militarily weak, and only the actions of a few heroic generals (such as Votigern and Arthur) managed to slow the rate at which their society was dominated by the Germanic attackers. Their main advantage lay in cavalry, which the invaders largely lacked. But even that could not save them.

In the Dark Ages, there are three types of Briton: those under the domination of the Anglo-Saxons, those in unconquered kingdoms, and those who have taken to the hills, to survive by raiding the villages of those who drove them away.

The benefit of Roman teaching provides the Britons with a +1 to initial Intelligence scores. The years of having Romans rule them, though, has also had an adverse effect. They suffer a –1 to initial Charisma scores.

Britons are similar in physical build and coloration to their Celtic cousins.

Britons are unlimited in level when following the Fighter, Ranger, Priest, Thief, Bard, or Wizard classes. If opting to dual-class, they may do so with combinations of Fighter, Priest, and Thief classes.

Some few Britons, after the terrible years following the withdrawal of the Roman legions, have turned back to their old gods. Speciality priests may thus opt to follow Roman or Celtic Christianity, or the Celtic deities and religions described in *Legends and Lore*, the FORGOTTEN REALMS® sourcebooks *Faiths and Avatars* and *Powers and Pantheons*, or HR3 *Celts*.

Scandinavians

The Scandinavians include the Danes, Norsemen, and Vikings who attacked the British Isles from the late eighth century, leading to invasion of the north and eastern regions of Anglo-Saxon England in the late ninth century.

More information on the use of Scandinavians in an AD&D campaign can be found in HR1 *Vikings*.

The climate of northern Europe makes the Scandinavians hardy and strong. Thus, they add +1 to initial Constitution and Strength scores. Their low level of learning and technology, in comparison to that possessed by the other peoples of the British Isles, is reflected in a –2 penalty to initial Intelligence.

Scandinavians generally have blond to sandy hair and blue or gray eyes. They use the *Player's Handbook* tables for height and weight determination.

Scandinavians are unlimited in advancement as Fighters, Rangers, Priests, Thieves, and Bards (the latter using the Skald kit described in PHBR7 *The Complete Bard's Handbook*, if available). Their Mages, who use the Runemaster kit, have developed the art of rune lore surpassing that possessed by the Anglo-Saxons. Thus, they are also unlimited in level as Wizards.

Nonhuman PC Races

Dwarves

The dwarves of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian mythology are underground guardians of mineral wealth, skillful in their work of such. They are vindictive and covetous by nature, driven by an unending lust for gold.

Unlike their standard AD&D cousins, they also lust for magic, specifically items crafted from gold and jewels. Although only the greatest of dwarven crafters can create such objects, the desire to own such items often leads them into twisted plots and trouble of their own devising.

Continued on page 36

Kingdoms of the British Isles

England

Bernicia & Deira: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, founded in 547 and 560 respectively and then unified into the kingdom of Northumbria by Ethelric in 588.

Chintern Saeten (Middle Anglia): Minor Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Founded c.526, the kingdom was short-lived, eventually becoming part of Mercia and East Anglia.

Cumbria: Major kingdom of the Britons. Eventually absorbed by Northumbria prior to the ninth century.

Dumnonii & Durotriges: Celtic and Briton kingdoms generally untouched by the Romans during their occupation but later absorbed by Wessex. The Durotriges were conquered by Wessex in c.825.

East Anglia: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Founded c.526, but never quite attained the level of power demonstrated by Mercia, Wessex, and Northumbria. Conquered by the Danes c.866–870 and later given to the Danes under Guthrum by Alfred the Great as part of the Treaty of Wedmore in 878. East Anglia was eventually recovered from the Danes by Edward the Elder in 916.

Elmet: Minor kingdom of the Britons that was absorbed by Northumbria and Mercia during expansions in the seventh century.

Essex: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Founded c.526. Submitted to Wessex, under pressure due to Egbert's successes against Mercia and Kent, c.825.

Gododdin, Rheged, and Dumfries: Minor Briton kingdoms absorbed by Strathclyde and Northumbria during the seventh century. Dumfries survived into the early ninth century.

Kent: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Founded in 449 by the Jutes Horsa and Hengist—the first of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to be established. The region was given to the Anglo-Saxons by Votigern in payment for promised aid against pirate attacks. Seeing the weak state of the Britons, the invitation led to invasion, and Votigern was finally defeated in 455. Kent was finally conquered in 825 by Egbert of Wessex.

Lindsey: Minor Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Short-lived as an independent kingdom, Lindsey became a province of (variously) Mercia and Northumbria.

Mercia: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom. One of the last kingdoms to become Christianized. Became the most powerful (and feared) kingdom under the reign of Penda (ruled 626–655), dominating both Northumbria and Wessex, and again under Offa (ruled 757-796). Conquered by Egbert of Wessex in 829, Mercia became subject to Wessex until Danish invasions finally destroyed the kingdom in 874. Although the region was recovered from the Danes c.916, Mercia, as a political region, was effectively extinct.

Northumbria: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom formed by the unification of Bernicia and Deira in 588. Dominated briefly by Mercia (under Penda) from 642 to 655 until Penda was slain in battle by Oswy (ruled 651–670). Under Oswy, Northumbria reached the height of its power. It was host to the Synod of Whitby (664), where Oswy decided for the Roman Church over the Celtic as the single form of Christianity to be followed within the whole of England. Northumbrian influence was effectively ended in 685 with the death of Egfrith in battle against the Picts under Brude. Conquered by the Danes in 867, Northumbria remained under Danish rule until Erik Bloodaxe was defeated by Edred, king of the English, in 954. Northumbria became an earldom from that point.

Strathclyde: Minor kingdom of the Britons, constantly pressured by Northumbria and the southern Picts, and by occasional clashes with the kingdom of Dal Riada until finally being subdued by a combined force of Picts under Angus and Northumbrians under Eadbert in 756. Remained a pacified kingdom until 870, when Olaf the White (a Dane) invaded from Ireland and forced Artgal, king of Strathclyde, to flee. Malcolm II of Scotland brought Strathclyde under the control of his kingdom in 1016.

Sussex: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Founded by Aelle in 477, the kingdom played little part in the power struggles that existed between Mercia, Wessex, and Northumbria.

Wessex: Major Anglo-Saxon kingdom founded by Cerdic and Cynric in 495. The royal lineage of Wessex eventually formed the basis for the Anglo-Saxon English royal house and included such luminaries as Alfred the Great and Ethelred I (St. Ethelred). Wessex began its rise to greater power under Egbert, who conquered the West Welsh, Kent, and Essex in 825, and Mercia in 829. Ethelwulf became king of England in 839. In 1066, upon the death of Edward the Confessor, Harold, Earl of Wessex, was chosen by the Anglo-Saxons as king in spite of the succession of William of Normandy established by Edward in 1051. The Battle of Hastings (14th October 1066) finally ended the Wessex line of English kings.

Scotland

Dal Riada: Established c.500 by the Ulaid Irish tribe of Dal Riata (Dal Riada Ulaid) fleeing from the encroachment of the Ui Neill people. The kingdom grew and interacted with the Pictish kingdoms to its north and east. Eventually, in 844, Kenneth I Mac-Alpin, king of the Scots, also became king of the Picts and united the Scots and Picts into the kingdom of Scotland.

Picts: The Picts were a scattered people, most of the time only nominally under the rule of their monarch (or monarchs). Saint Columba set up his church on the island of Iona as a mission to convert the Picts to Christianity in 563. Until the unification of Picts and Scots in 844, the Picts fought against all of their neighbors with varying degrees of success. It sometimes appears, when reading the histories of the northern regions of the British Isles, that they fought for each of their neighbors at some point too!

Wales

A Note on Welsh Pronunciation: Most of the words of the British Isles of the Dark Ages follow modern English pronunciation. (After

all, the language of the Dark Ages was English—although it is hard to recognize it as such today.) The Welsh language has a few exceptions. Briefly, these are:

c as in cake, never as in ace

ch as in Bach or loch, never as in church

dd as the "th" sound in those

f as the "v" sound in of. Dyfed, for example, is pronounced "Dih-ved."

ff as the "f" sound in film.

g as in get, never as in forge.

ng as in sing, never as in danger

ll produced by forming the "l" sound with the tongue, then trying to hiss

ph as the "ff" sound, but used at the beginning of words

r trilled, as its use in Spanish or Italian

s as in sit, never as in rose

si as the "sh" sound in shop

th as in think, never as in the (which is the "dd" sound)

y as in the "i" sound of sit or the "ea" of seat

w as in the "oo" of book

Welsh has no "z" sound.

Mabinogion. The royal lineage of Dyfed claimed origin from Ireland, and its people were bilingual (Welsh and Irish). Powys was the most privileged of the Welsh kingdoms during the Roman occupation. The death of its last native king, Cyngen, was recorded in the Annales Cambriae in 852. Cadwallon of Gwynedd (ruled 625–633) was an ally of Penda of Mercia and aided him in his campaigns against Northumbria.

Ireland

Unlike the kingdoms of Wales, England, and Scotland, the Irish never came under Roman

Brycheiniog, Buellt, Glywising, and Ystradtowy: Minor Welsh kingdoms, generally dominated and/or absorbed by the kingdoms of Gwynedd, Gwent, Dyfed, and Powys during the seventh and eighth centuries. Brycheiniog, a small mountain kingdom, was never actually conquered and lasted until the tenth century.

Dyfed, Gwent, Gwynedd, and Powys: Major Welsh kingdoms that play roles to varying degrees within the tales of *The*

control or influence and remained largely true to their Celtic roots (if not religion) throughout the Dark Ages. The northern Irish kingdoms suffered invasions and raids by the Vikings, and Dublin became the seat of power of Olaf the White and his heirs. The first attacks probably came from the Outer Hebrides (the "Sea-King of Lewis"). The Norsemen established independent kingdoms throughout Ireland during the ninth and tenth centuries, only to have their dominance end through their inability to stave off the Irish once their resistance to occupation began.

The kingdoms mapped are generally those political regions that existed before the Viking invasions. Dal Arridhe and Dal Riada Ulaid were the remaining regions populated by the old Ulaid people. The other kingdoms (Ailech, Connacht, Laighin, Midhe, Mumha, and Uladh) were transient, splitting and reuniting with other kingdoms history mentions (Ossory and Cahsel in the South, Oriel [or Airgialla] in the north, Brega as a breakaway part of Midhe, etc.).

As the Vikings were pushed back in the ninth century, the kings of these regions, especially in the north, attempted to establish themselves as High King of all Ireland (similar to the power struggles that had gone before within England). Although there were several High Kings, the unification of Ireland was not actually achieved until Brian Boru became High King in 1002.

Island Kingdoms

Aebudae: Located on the islands now known as the Outer Hebrides, these islands were populated by a tribal people. The islands were eventually dominated by Danish invaders.

Man: The Isle of Man lies about halfway between Ireland and England. It was populated by a Welsh/Irish mixed people until it was conquered by the Vikings in the tenth century.

Orcades: Similar to Aebudae, the Orcades were a tribal people until coming under Danish rule as the Jarldom of Orkney.

Thule: Situated in the modern Shetland Islands (probably), Thule was a place of near-legend. The pre- and early Celts of Britain considered it to be the northern extremity of the world. The Shetlands came under Danish rule prior to the tenth century.

Wight: An independent island kingdom before it came under the jurisdiction of Wessex in the late fifth to early sixth centuries.

Dwarven player characters are created using the standard rules presented in the *Player's Handbook*. They have all the special abilities of their standard AD&D counterparts.

Dwarven characters must observe the standard AD&D limits, with the following exceptions and alterations. Dwarves may become Wizards, using the Runemaster kit, to a limit of 7th level. They cannot be multi-classed Runemasters, nor can they be Priests or Clerics, but dwarves may be multi-classed characters as combined Fighter/Thieves.

Elves

There are three distinct groups of elves in the Dark Ages setting: the *alfar* (pl. alfen), the *dockalfar* (pl. dockalfen), and the *fey*.

The fey are the nearest counterparts to AD&D game elves. They dwell in hidden places, usually within wooded wilderness regions, and are most common (but still rare) in Ireland. Although benign in temperament, the fey are a remnant of an ancient race that thrived in the old Celtic world and are regarded as spirits and demons by the Christian Irish and Britons. Thus, the fey seek seclusion, hiding themselves from the world at large.

PC fey are created using the same rules as presented for elves in the *Player's Handbook*. They usually have blonde to red-blonde hair and piercing green eyes.

The alfar, on the other hand, are very active. Although they are subject to the same persecution as their fey brethren, most possess magical powers (in the shape of illusion and polymorph magic) that enable them to disguise their appearance and walk among humans. In true form, they have fuller figures than the fey and are slightly taller. The alfen are neither benign nor malevolent, or rather they can be either as whim takes them. However, certain alfen have risen to become leaders, even rulers, of men. (The Anglo-Saxon name Aelfric is literally translated to mean "ruler of the elves.")

Alfen characters gain a +1 to initial Charisma scores for their great confidence, while their generally chaotic nature means their initial Wisdom scores suffer a penalty of –1. Alfen do not possess infravision, but secret and concealed doors are just as hard to hide from their perception. Although they are resistant to *charm*-related magic, the level of this resistance is only 60%. Alfen possess the standard elven bow, sword, and surprise bonuses. Hair color ranges from brown to sandy, and their eyes range through shades of gray and hazel. Alfen determine height by adding the result of 1d12 to a base of 57 inches (53 inches for females). They determine weight by rolling 3d10 and adding the result to a base of 130 lbs. (95 lbs. for females).

The final elven group, the dockalfen, are an evil offshoot of the alfen, roughly equal to the feared drow of the AD&D game. They dwell underground, plotting their wicked schemes against the alfen, dwarves, and humans alike.

Dockalfen are the most agile of the elven races, with a +2 bonus to Dexterity. They are not physically strong and thus are penalized by –1 to both initial Strength and Constitution scores. As an underground race, dockalfen possess better infravision than other elves, ranging up to 90 feet. They have the same resistance to *charm*-related spells as fey. In addition, their use of deceptive magics makes them harder to fool with illusions, so they receive a +2 saving throw bonus against illusion-related spells. Although dockalfen are as adept with swords as other elves (they retain the standard elven +1 to hit with swords), they do not generally use bows and gain no special bonus with such weapons. Dockalfen are subtler than their cousins, receiving a –6 bonus to surprise rolls when alone or in the company of other elves in nonmetal armor (–3 if some kind of portal must be opened). The dockalfen have chalk-white skin and very pale hair (ranging from light blonde to stark white). Their eyes are black, and it is hard to tell where iris ends and pupil begins. Dockalfen use the standard elven height and weight tables from the *Player's Handbook*.

Fey may follow the Fighter, Ranger, Thief, Mage, or Bard classes. They are limited to 12th level as Fighters and Rangers, 13th level as Thieves and Bards, and are unlimited in advancement in the Mage class. They may become specialist Wizards in the fields of Abjuration, Enchantment/Charm, and Divination. They may multi-class in these combinations: Fighter/Thief, Fighter/Mage, Fighter/Mage/Thief, Ranger/Thief, and Ranger/Mage.

Alfen characters may become Fighters, Rangers, Thieves, Mages, or Priests. They are limited to 12th level as Priests, 15th level as Fighters, Rangers, and Mages, and are unlimited in level as Thieves. They may become Specialist Wizards in the following schools: Abjuration, Alteration, Enchantment/Charm, and Divination. An alfen character may opt to multi-class in the following combinations: Fighter/Thief, Fighter/Mage, Fighter/Mage/Thief, Fighter/Priest, or Ranger/Thief.

Dockalfen may become Fighters, Thieves, and Mages. They are limited to 10th level as Fighters and 15th level as Thieves. With the exception of Specialist Illusionists, dockalfen Mages are limited to 12th level. They are unlimited in advancement as Illusionists. As multi-classed characters, dockalfen may operate only as Fighter/Thieves or Thief/Illusionists.

Elven Ability Score Ranges

	Str.	Dex.	Con.	Int.	Wis.	Cha
Fey	3/18	6/18	7/18	8/18	3/18	8/18
Alfen	4/18	4/18	3/18	5/18	7/18	10/18
Dockalfen	3/17	10/18	3/16	6/18	3/18	4/18

Humanoid Races

In addition to dwarves and elves, Anglo-Saxon myth contains a number of other humanoid creatures suitable for use as PCs. Many of these humanoid races are dealt with in more depth in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*. The erlking and trow, unique to an Anglo-Saxon campaign, are detailed below in the format of *The Complete Book of Humanoids*.

Erlking (Forest Goblin)

Related to goblins and hobgoblins, the erlking dwell in the depths of forests, luring travelers into ambushes and traps. Although most of their race are malevolent, there are a few who have risen above the petty evil of their brethren to become adventurers.

Erlking have forest-green skins, often mottled with earth-brown patches. They typically stand around 5½ feet tall. Their eyes glow with a deep, golden color, the

twin points often being the last thing a traveler in the deep forest sees before the forest goblins descend for the kill. Their features are bestial, framed by coarse, black hair and dominated by hairless snouts lined with rotting teeth.

Ability Score Adjustments. Erlking are a hardy race, so they add +1 to initial Constitution rolls. Their natural agility is supreme, allowing them to move among the trees with ease. Their initial Dexterity rolls carry a +2 bonus. Although possessing high cunning, they are not endowed with great Intelligence and suffer –1 to initial Intelligence scores. Finally, because of their barbaric habits and foul features, they are penalized by –2 to initial Charisma.

Ability Score Range

Ability	Min.	Max.
Strength	5	18
Dexterity	10	18
Constitution	8	18
Intelligence	3	17
Wisdom	3	18
Charisma	3	14

Class Restrictions

Class	Max. Level
Warrior	
Fighter	12
Ranger	5
Rogue	
Thief	15

Erlking may operate as multi-classed Fighter/Thieves.

Hit Dice. Erlking receive Hit Dice by class.

Alignment. Erlking tend toward Neutral or Chaotic Evil. PC erlking may be of any alignment, usually retaining either a Neutral or Chaotic attitude.

Natural Armor Class. 10.

Languages. Erlking, Goblin.

Roleplaying Suggestions. Erlking are bandits by nature. They have little ability with craft and so steal what they need. This general attitude is usually seen in those rare erlking who become adventurers. Braver and less inclined to evil than their brothers, the erlking PC excels in the role of a fighting rogue, bringing his knowledge of the wilderness, natural ability in the subtler arts, as well as a good sword arm to the few adventuring groups that tolerate an erlking in their midst. Even fewer erlking completely discard their racial tendencies, taking up the Ranger class and defending the very travelers their people enjoy waylaying.

Special Advantages. Erlking possess infravision to a distance of 60 feet. Their natural coloration, combined with their knowledge of their habitat, bestows them with the ability to Hide in Shadows and Move Silently through forest regions, with the same chances for success as a Ranger of equal level. This also provides them with the edge of surprise, causing opponents to suffer a –2 to surprise rolls should the erlking attack in ambush within wooded regions.

Special Disadvantages. Erlking are recognized by most races as evil, twisted bandits. An erlking arriving at a human town is likely to be set upon before entering the gates.

Monstrous Traits. Appearance.

Superstitions. Erlking believe they have been cursed by the gods, so they hide in the dark forests. This gives them a fear of open spaces that approaches agoraphobia, for they believe that outside their natural environment they are naked to the perception of the gods, who laugh at the twisted, bitter creatures the erlking have become.

Weapon Proficiencies. Erlking use whatever weapons they can find.

Nonweapon Proficiencies. *Recommended:* Direction Sense, Hunting, Set Snares, Survival (temperate and subarctic forests), Weather Sense.

Height. Erlking determine height by rolling 2d6 and adding the result to a base height of 60 inches (58 inches for females).

Weight. Base weight for an erlking character is 130 lbs. (110 for females). To this they add the roll of 4d10.

Age. Erlking begin play at an age of 20 + 2d8 years old. Their maximum age is determined by adding the roll of 2d20 to a base of 90.

Thief Ability Adjustments.
Find/Remove Traps +10%
Move Silently +5%
Hide in Shadows +10%
Read Languages –10%

Firbolg

Firbolgs are detailed in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*. In a Dark Ages campaign, they are the remnant of an ancient race, largely driven into small, isolated pockets by the ancestors of the Irish. They can be found within the forested hills of Ireland and Wales, trying to hold onto what little remains of their culture before human domination of the British Isles finally drives them into extinction. Wise by nature, they recognize that the struggle their race now faces is within the natural order of things. This makes them taciturn and melancholy, often appearing depressed to those few outside their own people that come into contact with them.

Goblins and Hobgoblins

These two races are described in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*. Hobgoblins, also known as hill goblins, make their homes in the isolated valleys in the hills of the British Isles. Like their erlking brethren, they waylay travelers for supplies, equipment, and food.

Ordinary goblins are the most common of the three types of goblin in a Dark Ages campaign. They dwell in hidden places in the lowland regions, often making their homes within striking distance of major trade and travel routes. It is not uncommon for an eolderman to raise a fyrd to hunt these evil beings to keep his people safe from their predation.

Ogres

Ogres are detailed in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*. They dwell in the wilderness regions of northern England and the highlands of Scotland, raiding human villages and waylaying travelers. The Picts respect their strength and often employ them as mercenaries in their battles against the Britons neighboring their kingdoms. Because of this relationship, half-ogres (also described in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*) are not entirely unknown in Pictish society.

Trow

Loosely related to both dwarves and trolls, the trow dwell in and around the northern isles off the coast of Scotland—the Shetlands and the Orkneys. There are two types of trow: aquatic and land. Both have Anglo-Saxon skin color.

Petty thieves by nature, trow live by stealing fish from nets and sneaking into settlements during the night to burgle warehouses and stores. In desperate

Dockelfen, erlking, and aquatic trow make strange allies and formidable foes.

murder to get what they need. Thus, the island people fear the trow, setting guards against their incursions.

Trow have flat faces with wide, flaring noses that almost dominate their features. Their eyes are sunken and piggy, their mouths small and thin, providing even more attention to their disastrous nostrils. Although not as stocky as their distant, dwarven cousins, they roughly equal them in height. The sea-trow's nose has gill slats in place of nostrils.

Ability Score Adjustments. The trow possess little physical prowess, suffering a –1 penalty to both initial Strength and Constitution scores. Their sneaky, thieving ways provide them with a +2 to initial Dexterity. When confronted, they are generally nervous and cowardly, suffering a –1 penalty to initial Charisma.

Ability Score Range

Ability	Min.	Max.
Strength	3	17
Dexterity	9	18
Constitution	4	17
Wisdom	3	18
Charisma	3	16

Class Restrictions

Class	Max. Level
Warrior	
Fighter	4
Wizard	
Illusionist	5
Transmuter	4
Rogue	
Thief	U

Trow may be multi-classed Fighter/Thieves, Illusionist/Thieves, or Transmuter/Thieves.

Hit Dice. Trow receive hit dice by class.

Alignment. Trow tend toward Chaotic Neutral. Player character trow may be of any alignment but are generally Chaotic in nature.

Natural Armor Class. 10.

Languages. Trow.

Roleplaying Suggestions. On occasion, trow parents who have not managed to steal enough food to support their children may sneak into human homes, own. What becomes of the human child in such cases probably doesn't bear imagining. The fate of the trow-child is much better. Until fully grown, there is little to differentiate an ugly human child with the trow usurper. Given that the trow also have some knowledge of Illusion and Alteration magic, it may be some years before the human surrogate parents realize what has befallen them. The fate of such changelings once discovered is often harsh.

Trow changelings present the best role for PCs. Brought up apart from the culture of their parents, they are given better chance to learn useful skills. Given the attitude of a human settlement "blessed" by the presence of a trow changeling, it is likely that such trow who are not initially slain and manage to survive the perils of the wilderness will become adventurers of a sort. Some may even be confused about their actual heritage, spending a good portion of their lives believing they are human and wondering about

their parents' treatment.

This trow practice has led to the island saying "Trow tak' thee," a phrase used to scare children into good behavior.

Special Advantages. Aquatic trow can breath underwater with no penalty. However, they may spend only a length of time equal to their Constitution scores, in hours, away from their watery homes. Although all trow have particularly bad eyesight, their sense of smell surpasses even that of canines. Thus, trow can detect illusions, including *invisibility*, unless the illusion also produces an accurate olfactory component, some method of masking the smell of an invisible creature, or some other olfactory effect (such as the stench of a ghast) is also present.

Special Disadvantages. Because of their keen sense of smell, trow suffer a –2 to all saving throws made against gaseous or olfactory attacks (such as *stinking cloud* spells). Their poor eyesight leaves them particularly hampered when using missile weapons at range, giving them an additional –2 penalty to all attacks made beyond a range limit of 30 feet (this is in addition to any penalties due to weapon range).

Monstrous Traits. Bestial Habits (Cowardly).

Superstitions. Trow fear the moon, seeing it as the monstrous eye of the baleful god that causes all their ills. If they must act during nights with a full moon (and they do so only under exceptional circumstances), they do so with a –4 (or, where applicable, –20%) penalty to all die rolls.

Weapon Proficiencies. Trow use small weapons, such as daggers and knives. Their small size and relatively poor strength leads them to avoid larger weaponry. In addition, they tend to shun missile weapons, given their poor ability with them due to their eyesight.

Nonweapon Proficiencies. Carpentry, Fishing, Leatherworking, Swimming.

Height. Being of similar height to dwarves, trow roll 1d10 and add this to a base value of 43 inches (41 for females).

Weight. Trow roll 3d8 to determine weight, adding the result to 100 lbs. (90 lbs. for females).

Age. The starting age of a trow character is equal to 10 + 1d10 years. They live for 85 + 3d12 years.

Thief Ability Adjustments.
Pick Pockets +5%
Open Locks +5%
Move Silently +10%
Hide in Shadows +10%
Read Languages –10%

PC Kits

Below are presented several kits for use within a Dark Ages campaign. All kits are presented in the format of the Complete book relevant to the specific class group (e.g., the Warrior kits are presented in the format of the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*). Additional notes provide advice for using existing AD&D kits within an Anglo-Saxon setting.

Land

Several of the following kits give an option for starting funds to be translated into parcels of land, which the character owns in the name of his lord. The amount of land owned, in addition to the character's own position in the social hierarchy of his culture, determines his status. For example, a ceorl who owns five acres of farmland affords higher status than one of similar rank who owns a single acre.

In general, every 10 gp remaining from a character's starting funds after all items of equipment have been purchased may be traded in for a single acre of farmland. Within this land, the character also has a house (usually of wood, but it may be of stone if more than three acres are owned) and one or more barns and other such structures as necessary. A character gains income from the land equal to 5 gp per calendar month per acre, except during winter months. The character must tithe 20% to the local lord. To gain income from a parcel of land, the character must also employ one laborer per acre, using the standard wage rates provided in the *DMG* (i.e., 1 gp per month).

Warrior Kits

The only Warrior classes available in an Anglo-Saxon campaign are Fighters and Rangers. The age of chivalry, knighthood, and holy deeds has not yet come, so there is little place for Paladins.

Additionally, although Warriors are the most common class in most AD&D settings, this is even more true of the Anglo-Saxon campaign. The social hierarchy of the Anglo-Saxons is built around the military, and every free man is expected to provide service to the fyrd. Hence, even the lowliest gebur is likely to possess skills as a 1st-level Fighter.

Kits from Existing Sources

The Berserker kit (from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*) is relevant to certain Warriors of Scandinavian descent. Certain eoldermen could also make use of the Noble Warrior kit from the same source. Both Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons were initially pirates, raiders of the coastal lands held by the Britons, which makes the Pirate/Outlaw kit relevant to both these peoples. The Celtic Irish also did their fair share of pirating after the withdrawal of the Roman legions from mainland Britain.

The Ferelan kit (from the *Complete Ranger's Handbook*) provides an excellent model for those rare erlking Rangers. Other kits of use to most Rangers of the Dark Ages include the Giant Killer, Guardian, Justifier, Mountain Man, Pathfinder, Sea Ranger, and Warden.

Ceorl

Classes: Fighter

Description: The Ceorls are the mainstay of Anglo-Saxon culture. They represent the free-men of society, ranging from laborers to landed commoners.

Unlike Thegns, Ceorls are not professional military men. They are craftsmen and farmers who are required, by the law of their king, to maintain a readiness for joining the fyrd when it is required. Thus, although adept in their own crafting skills, they also have some military training in the use of arms and armor.

Ceorls must have a minimum Strength score of 7.

Role: Most Anglo-Saxon Fighters belong to the ranks of the Ceorls, but it is more likely that adventuring Fighters will be Thegns. For a Ceorl to enter the ranks of professional adventurers, he must have been assigned to such a role by his Thegn or eolderman, or something disastrous (such as a major ogre, giant, or goblin raid) must have happened to propel him from his normal duties. A Ceorl whose eolderman has been slain could, for example, find himself becoming an adventurer through

necessity. Of course, a Ceorl may engage in adventurous pursuits as part of a mustered fyrd.

Secondary Skills: Ceorl characters should select a secondary skill that represents their professional duties outside the fyrd. Suggestions for relevant Ceorl secondary skills include: Armorer, Bowyer/Fletcher, Farmer, Fisher, Groom, Hunter, Leatherworker, Mason, Miner, Shipwright, Tailor/Weaver, Teamster/Freighter, Trader/Barterer, Trapper/Furrier, Weaponsmith, and Woodworker/ Carpenter.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required:* Ax (francisca or sparte—treat as handaxes), Spear. Often, proficiency with the scramasax (Anglo-Saxon dagger) is also attained. Some influential Ceorls may also gain proficiency in the seax (Anglo-Saxon short sword, pronounced "say-ax"). A few, especially those who are professional hunters, may also select proficiency in the use of the longbow or shortbow.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus Proficiency:* A Ceorl gains a single bonus nonweapon proficiency relevant to his chosen secondary skill. *Required:* A Ceorl's initial nonweapon proficiency slots must be spent on proficiencies related to his chosen craft. For example, a leather worker may gain the Leatherworking proficiency as his bonus, and spend his initial quota of slots on proficiencies such as Cobbling, Seamstress/Tailor, and so forth. Of course, some of a character's initial slots may be spent on the bonus craft nonweapon proficiency to increase the character's skill in his chosen field. *Recommended:* Agriculture, Animal Handling, Animal Lore, Animal Training, Armorer, Artistic Ability, Blacksmithing, Bowyer/Fletcher, Brewing, Carpentry, Cobbling, Cooking, Engineering, Fire-building, Fishing, Herbalism, Leatherworking, Mining, Pottery, Rope Use, Seamstress/Tailor, Stonemasonry, Weaving

Equipment: Ceorls must spend their initial funds on one weapon, one suit of armor, and miscellaneous items of equipment relevant to their professional duties.

Special Benefits: A Ceorl gains a +1 bonus for every three levels attained to the primary nonweapon proficiency of his profession (i.e., the one he selected as his bonus). Upon attaining 5th level, or any time thereafter, a Ceorl may be raised into the ranks of the Thegns by his lord. In exception to the standard rules for abandoning a kit, the elevated Ceorl effectively abandons the Ceorl kit and replaces it with that used by Thegns.

Special Hindrances: Unless special circumstance dictates, a Ceorl is at the beck and call of his lord (whether a higher-ranking Ceorl, a Thegn, or an eolderman). He may not resist the orders of his betters without risking banishment, or worse.

To determine the initial social class of a Ceorl character, roll 1d6: 1, gebur; 3–5, kotsetla; 6, geneatas.

Ceorls may not specialize in any weapon. If using the PLAYER'S OPTION® rules, Ceorls may not gain Armor or Shield proficiency, nor may they select a weapon of choice.

Wealth Options: Ceorls of gebur and kotsetla social classes begin play with only 3d4 × 10 gp, which must be spent on equipment. Any funds left over after character generation are lost. Geneatas rank Ceorls begin play with 4d4 × 10 gp, with any excess funds being kept or translated into land ownership.

While in the service of another, Ceorls gain pay per week, depending on their social class: geneatas gain 2d10 sp, kotsetla 1d12 sp, and gebur 1d6 sp.

Races: Of the human races, only Anglo-Saxons and Britons who live within Anglo-Saxon lands may become Ceorls. Some few alfen, posing as humans, may also select this kit.

Horseman

Classes: Fighter, Ranger.

Description: Although horses and horse-drawn vehicles were, along with waterborne craft, the primary form of vehicular transport in Dark Ages Britain, the use of cavalry was neglected by all but the Britons after the withdrawal of Rome until about the mid to late eighth century. To the Britons, this represented their best advantage against the Anglo-Saxon invaders.

In Briton culture, the Horseman represents the elite of the warrior classes. Not only were they one of the few professional military figures left, they also represented one of the few military tactics that the ancestors of the Britons had taught the Romans. Unfortunately for the Britons, a good cavalry needs to be supported by an effective infantry, and that is something they lost with the Roman legions.

Horsemen must have a Wisdom of at least 12, a Dexterity of 9 or more, and a Charisma of 12 or more. They may not be Chaotic or Evil in alignment.

Role: Horsemen represent the professional military of the Britons. While in the saddle, they lead the desperate fight for freedom against the Germanic invaders. While out of it, they attempt to bolster their people and bring them together into a force that has some chance of success. Horsemen may adventure as representatives of their people, perhaps heading into the hills to gather together those Britons who have fled there or seeking some artifact that may serve as an icon to bring hope to the beleaguered.

Secondary Skills: Being professional military men, horsemen tend toward those secondary skills that best serve them in this field. Thus, should they take a secondary skill, it should be from the following list: Armorer, Bowyer/Fletcher, Groom, or Weaponsmith.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required:* Lance (light or medium) or Spear. As members of the elite military, Horsemen often become adept in using the short sword.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus Proficiency:* Riding (horse). *Recommended:* Animal Handling, Animal Training, Etiquette, Armorer, Weaponsmith.

Equipment: All Horsemen begin play with a battle-trained mount (a light warhorse), as well as bit, bridle, riding saddle, saddle blanket, and a pair of small saddle bags. Their initial funds may be spent as they please (probably investing in armor and weaponry).

Special Benefits: A Horseman has a special empathy with his mount. Thus, he performs all Riding proficiency checks pertaining to his mount with a +1 bonus. This bonus increases by +1 for every four levels attained.

Because of their station within the society of the Britons, they receive a +2 reaction bonus when dealing with any Briton. Additionally, when a Horseman is traveling, any Briton will gladly provide shelter and provisions under normal circumstances.

Special Hindrances: Horsemen are bound by duty to their people. They can

never refuse to aid a Briton in peril, losing half their earned experience points for the game session should they do so. Additionally, if word of such neglect spreads, their normal –2 reaction bonus toward Britons is replaced with a +4 penalty.

Wealth Options: Because of their status, Horsemen are well off in both coin and land. Thus, they receive 8d4 × 10 gp for starting funds, and any coin remaining can be translated into land.

Races: Only Britons may take the Horseman kit.

Thegn

Classes: Fighter, Ranger.

Description: Thegns are the professional military of Anglo-Saxon society. They can be guards employed by eoldermen, the nucleus of any fyrd mustered by their lord, or the elite King's Thegns—the nearest equivalent to the knight.

Role: The duties of a Thegn to his lord include aiding and organizing the fyrd, administrating the Ceorls who labor in the lands of the eolderman, and performing all military duties (such as guard duty) that lie outside the battlefield of war (i.e., those duties that are still required while no fyrd is in existence). Of all the fighting types of Anglo-Saxon culture, the Thegns are the most likely to engage in adventure, performing missions for their lord, including such traditional adventuring pursuits as keeping the land free from human and humanoid incursion and guarding trade routes.

Secondary Skills: Although a good proportion of Thegns have been born into the ranks of the military, some have also been elevated from the social ranks of the Ceorls. Thus, any secondary skill is relevant to characters taking this kit.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required:* Spear, Ax (sparte or francisca—treat as handaxes). Other weapons a Thegn may learn the use of include scramasax (dagger), seax (short sword), framea (lance), and bow (long or short). A handful may still practice the use of the falx, an old, two-handed sword with a curving blade in common use from the first century B.C. by Celtic and Germanic tribal warriors (treat as a longsword, in terms of weapon speed and damage).

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Armorer, Bowyer/Fletcher, Etiquette (especially for King's Thegns), Hunting, Leatherworking, Seamanship, Weaponsmithing.

A Runecaster reads the portents for his king before the day of battle.

Equipment: Thegns are not limited in terms of what equipment they may own. They must initially purchase at least one weapon (spear or seax), a suit of armor (usually some form of chainmail), and a shield (small or medium).

Special Benefits: Thegns carry all the benefits of their class. Thegns of the Fighter class may specialize normally, and, if using the PLAYER'S OPTION rules, they may take proficiency in Armor and Shield use.

Any Thegn of 5th level or above may, subject to the campaign, be called upon to enter the ranks of the King's Thegns. King's Thegns have no living expenses beyond those required for the upkeep of land they own, since the king houses and feeds his warriors. They must, however, tithe 15% of all treasures they gain, whether from adventuring in the name of their king, or from battlefield spoils.

At 9th level, a Thegn who has performed well might be elevated to the position of eolderman, unless the character previously followed the Ceorl kit.

Special Hindrances: Thegns are bound by honor and duty to their lord. They cannot refuse an order from their superiors. The penalty for doing so is execution on a charge of treason.

Wealth Options: Thegns receive the standard 5d4 × 10 gp for initial funds. Any remaining funds can be retained or converted into land.

Races: Only Anglo-Saxons and alfen who are posing as Anglo-Saxons may become Thegns. Although any member of any race who has performed great service to a king or eolderman may hold the title of Thegn, they can never follow the Thegn kit.

Wizard Kits

Wizards in an Anglo-Saxon campaign are keepers of ancient lore. Although, in regions where Christianity has become dominant, they may be viewed with mistrust because of their learning in what is, essentially, pagan lore, Wizards are not tied to following the pagan faith. A good many Wizards

New Spell: Scribe Rune

(Enchantment/Charm)
Level: 1
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 5 rounds
Area of Effect: One item
Saving Throw: None

This spell allows a Runemaster to scribe runes onto one item. See the kit description for the different types and proper usage of this spell. The material component for the spell is the item receiving the rune, which must be of good quality and in an undamaged state.

from contemporary legends (Merlin, for example) were respectful of Christianity, some even following the faith devoutly.

Kits from Existing Sources

There are a few Wizard kits described in the *Complete Wizard's Handbook* that are relevant to a Dark Ages campaign. The introspective, philosophical wise men who live in the wilderness as isolationist hermits are eminently suited to the Mystic kit. Hedge wizards who perform their magic to aid the community in which they live can be represented by the Peasant Wizard kit. Finally, British folklore is filled with stories of practitioners of forbidden arts, in the name of ancient, pagan gods. The Witch kit can be used to represent such individuals.

Runemaster

Description: Both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian legends speak of the wisdom of rune-lore. Woden of the Anglo-Saxons (the god of magic) and Odin of the Scandinavians both suffered greatly to learn the power of runes and pass this learning on to their people. Runemasters are the mortal receivers of this lore.

Unlike standard AD&D Wizards, Runemasters do not cast all spells directly. Instead, they prepare items by carving or otherwise marking a rune or series of runes that temporarily empower the item with the desired spell or spells. Instead of rolling balls of sulphur, incanting strange words, and waving their arms around to produce a *fireball* spell, for example, a Runemaster may prepare a staff or wand with the specific combination of runes required to later produce the effect. This means that, generally, a Runemaster is weaker than a standard AD&D Wizard if caught short-footed but more powerful if given the time to prepare.

The exception to this practice is their use of Divination spells. All spells of the Divination school require only a full set of special runestones (flat stones, each inscribed with a single character of the runic alphabet). In place of verbal, material, and somatic spell components, the runemaster casts these runestones in a manner particular to the spell in question, and then reads them to determine the result of his divination. For detection spells, such as *detect invisibility*, the Runemaster places the correct runestone onto his forehead, holding it in place with a single finger, while the spell is in effect.

Preferred Schools: Abjuration, Divination, Enchantment/Charm

Barred Schools: None

Role: The Runemaster is a respected, if feared, member of the community in both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures. Although very rare (even the mighty bretwaldas can boast only a single Runemaster of power, with a handful of lesser pupils), they are nonetheless mighty figures.

Although, like all people, Runemasters are subject to their king, they can boast a certain amount of independence. This is mainly due to the respect they gain from even those of higher social rank. This leaves them with the ability to come and go as they please, performing whatever personal schemes they might plot.

Secondary Skills: Although Runemasters are generally above the mundane crafts practiced by their people, they must still possess skills that enable them to create the items upon which they etch their runes. The most relevant secondary skills are Mason and Woodworker/Carpenter, although a few may also be skilled Weaponsmiths.

Weapon Proficiency: It is rare to see a Runemaster without his staff, upon which he often scribes several runes to ensure the times he is caught unprepared are few and far between.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Ancient Language, runes. The most common runic alphabet in use by Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians of the Dark Ages is the Futhark, but regional variations of this exist. *Required:* Artistic Ability (rune scribing). *Recommended:* Carpentry, Spellcraft, Stonemasonry, Weaponsmithing.

Equipment: Other than his staff, his runes, and the lore books from which he draws his magical knowledge, the Runemaster feels the need for little in the way of equipment. A newly created Runemaster begins play with a full set of prepared runes (of which there are usually twenty five individual stones or the equivalent), and a single volume describing the combinations of runic enchantments required to perform the spells he knows.

Rune Magic: Runemasters enjoy the same spell progression as standard AD&D Wizards, even though they cast the spells differently and in advance of the spell's actual use. All Divination school spells must be memorized normally before they are used.

To prepare runes on an item, the Runemaster must first memorize the spells he wishes to cast onto the item. The item must then be prepared with a *scribe rune* spell (described above), after which the desired spells are cast (using standard casting times) as the runes are etched onto the object.

There are two different types of rune: bonus runes and spell runes. Bonus runes require no further spells beyond the *scribe rune* spell, but each rune requires a separate casting of that spell. Spell runes require a single casting of the *scribe rune* spell, for which the Runemaster may etch any number of spell runes onto an item by "casting" the relevant spell. All spells to be cast onto the rune must be cast within a single hour of the initial *scribe rune* spell.

Either type of rune remains active for a number of days equal to the Runecaster's number of additional languages for Intelligence (see Table 4 in the *Player's Handbook*). After this time, the power of the rune fades completely. When one rune on an item fades, there is a 10% chance that each of any other runes on the same item spontaneously fades, even if its duration has not expired.

Example: *A Runecaster with an Intelligence of 16 places a bonus rune on his dagger. Two days later, he places a* sleep *spell rune on the same dagger. On the sixth day after he cast the bonus rune, that one fades, and there*

is a 10% chance that the spell rune fades too, even though it would normally last three more days.

A bonus rune bestows certain bonuses to the item in question or the wielder of the item. Possible bonus runes include: +1 to hit, +1 damage, +1 to a specific category of saving throw, or +1 bonus to Armor Class. For example, a Runemaster could enrune a short sword to provide a +2 to hit bonus and a +1 damage bonus, by casting three separate *scribe rune* spells within the space of one hour—two attack bonus runes and one damage bonus rune. Being magical spells in nature, bonus runes are subject to magic resistance, *dispel magic*, and similar effects. *Dispel magic* effectively removes the runes from the item. In such cases, each bonus rune must be dispelled (or resisted against) individually. Bonus to hit runes can provide a weapon with the magical bonus required to hit certain creatures. True magical items that confer a bonus (such as a properly enchanted *short sword* +2) are not open to runic scribing—their magical nature prevents the runes from being etched upon them.

Spell runes provide a single casting of the spell so enruned. A 5th-level Runemaster could, for example, enrune a single *fireball* spell upon his staff. When the spell is cast from the rune, the rune vanishes. Of course, a Runemaster may place multiple runes of the same type (two *fireball* runes, for example) on the same object provided there is enough room. Only one spell rune may be released ("cast") in a single round, but the initiative modifier of a rune is always 1. Spell runes may only be released by the Runemaster who scribed them (with the exception of accidental release—see below), and their effects are determined by the casting level of the Runemaster when he originally scribed them.

As with bonus runes, spell runes cannot be etched onto true magical items.

The number of runes that may be scribed onto a specific item depends on the size of the item. As a rule of thumb, a dagger-sized item may hold up to two runes, a short sword four, a staff eight, and a medium shield up to ten. No item may hold more than ten runes, regardless of its size.

Both types of rune are subject to accidentally release. Any time an enruned item is subject to violence (this includes hitting an opponent with an enruned weapon), and any time the item needs to make a saving throw, there is a flat 10% chance for bonus runes (rolled separately for each rune) and a 10% chance per spell level for spell runes that a rune is released. Bonus runes are rendered ineffective. Spell runes release their spells, centered on the item to which they are attached.

Wealth Options: Runemasters receive standard initial funds, equal to (1d4+1) × 10 gp.

Races: Only Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, dwarves, alfen, and dockalfen may be Runemasters.

Priest Kits

Priests in the Dark Ages were of utmost importance. In the early part of the Anglo-Saxon dominance of England, the pagan priests were almost as important as the kings themselves. When the Irish and Roman Christian missionaries began the long, arduous task of converting the pagan invaders, it was to the kings they came, making the religious canon held by the people a part of royal doctrine. The political connections did not end there. The great Celtic Christian missionary, Saint Columba, was no common priest—his blood-right led to the very throne of the Irish High King. In later periods of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the various bishops and archbishops became as influential (often more so) than the eoldermen and eorls. Royalty and religion became inextricably connected.

Some of the most celebrated recorders and scholars also heralded from the church. Bede, who wrote the definitive work on early Anglo-Saxon histories, was a monk of Jarrow, and his works became renowned among both kings and bishops alike.

Kits from Existing Sources

The Nobleman Priest, Peasant Priest, and Scholar Priest can be found within a Dark Ages setting, particularly the Nobleman Priest, which can be best used to represent the bishops and archbishops of the mid to late periods of the age. The Scholar Priest and the Scholar Monk, presented below, are related, but where the scholars of the general clergy tend to be recorders of lore from their own point of view and are generally active in the hierarchy of the church, the Scholar Monk represents a more neutral historian, more determined to record what is accurate, rather than what is acceptable to the ethics of his faith.

The Role of Missionaries

Some of the more adventurous Christian priests left the sanctity of their established churches to bring their faith to the invaders. They became missionaries, entering into the courts of the pagan kings, often at great risk, but with the possibility of great reward for success.

The role of a missionary is open to any character following either Christian faith, with the exception of those who opt to take the Scholar Monk kit presented below. This option is secondary to class and kit, however, being more an opportunity for roleplaying than any definition of skills. DMs and players should consider the possible impacts, conflicts, and situations that may arise through the inclusion of such a character within their games. For example, a missionary operating within the kingdom of Kent may well find himself attached to St. Augustine's mission, and might be subject to the rewards his mentor gained through the successful completion of his task. On the other hand, a Christian missionary operating within the early Mercian kingdom may well find himself the target of insults, and a number of much sharper implements, for daring to speak out against the revered Germanic pantheon.

Scholar Monk

Description: Monks of the Dark Ages were deeply spiritual individuals who dedicated their lives to their faith. Many of them became noteworthy scholars during their monastic careers. The Scholar Monk is such an individual.

Unlike the related Scholar Priest kit, however, the vows taken by the monks prevent them from either invention or subjective interpretation of the subjects they study. Although this often brings them at odds with the established church, it does make them more respected by kings and others, who view their works as accurate observations rather than yet more religious doctrine. Indeed, it is to the Scholar Monk that

The Futhark

The Futhark was the phonetic, runic alphabet used by the Germanic tribes until the introduction of the more familiar Roman alphabet that has been in common usage since the seventh century. The characters of the Futhark, it is thought, were developed from both Roman and Greek sources. They were used not only in writing but also for religious and divination purposes.

Each of the twenty-four recognizable runes was assigned a name, a sound that it represented, and a meaning. Some Nordic versions of the set also included a twenty-fifth "blank" rune, used to portray hidden or unknowable subjects when used for divination.

The name "Futhark" is derived from the sounds of the first six runes in the set (similar to the way we derive the word "qwerty" from keyboards), as traditionally organized. The order presented here is less traditional but more pertinent within mystical and religious connotations. The runes of the Anglo-Saxon version of the set, with their names, meanings, phonetic sounds, and the traditional order within the set appear below.

Runic Divination

The simplest form of divination with the Futhark was to randomly select three runestones (flat stones, each etched with a single rune from the set), placing them in a line from right to left as they were chosen. The first (right-most) rune represented a current situation. The central rune gave advice on how to cope with that situation. The third rune provided insight into the possible outcome of the situation should the advice be taken. Runestones drawn in reverse (the rune appears upside-down) were translated as being roughly opposite to the meaning of the rune. There were other methods of varying complexity, offering various levels of insight and advice.

Various sources exist for those interested in introducing runes in greater detail within their campaign. Ralph Blum's *New Book of Runes* (BCA, 1992), although concentrating on the Viking use of the Futhark, provides an in-depth view of runic divination. In addition, the articles "Runes" (by Phil Tatercznski with Roger Raupp) and "Runestones" (by Ed Greenwood), from *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #69, are also of interest.

Rune	Name	Meaning	Sound	Order
ᛗ	Man	The Self	m	20
ᚷ	Gyfu	Partnership; a gift	g	7
ᚩ	Os	Signals; message	a	4
ᛟ	Ethel	Separation; retreat; inheritance	o	23
ᚢ	Ur	Strength; manhood; womanhood; The Ox	u	2
ᛈ	Peorth	Initiation; secret matters	p	14
ᚾ	Nyth	Constraint; necessity; pain	n	10
ᛜ	Ing	Fertility; new beginnings; the god Ing	ng or nj	22
ᛇ	Eoh	Defense; The Yew	ei	13
ᛉ	Eohlsecg	Protection; The Elk	z	15
ᚠ	Feoh	Possessions; nourishment; cattle	f	1
ᚹ	Wyn	Joy; light	w	8
ᛄ	Ger	Harvest; fertile season; one year	j	12
ᚳ	Cen	Opening; fire; torch	k	6
ᛏ	Tir	Warrior; victory; the god Tir	t	17
ᛒ	Beorc	Growth; rebirth; The Birch	b	18
ᛖ	Eh	Movement; progress; The Horse	e	19
ᛚ	Lagu	Flow; water	l	21
ᚻ	Haegl	Disruption; Nature's force; elemental power	h	9
ᚱ	Rad	Journey; communication; union; reunion	r	5
ᚦ	Thorn	Gateway; the god Thunor	th	3
ᛞ	Daeg	Breakthrough; transformation, day	d	24
ᛁ	Is	Standstill; impediment; ice	i	11
ᛋ	Sigel	Wholeness; life force; The Sun	s	16

kings and eoldermen often turn to answer questions that they may have with respect to some subject or another.

Examples of Scholar Monks in a Dark Ages setting include the venerable Bede and Peter Ellis' literary detective-monk Cadfael. Those interested in medieval detective fiction should see Jon Picken's "The Murder Medieval" in *DRAGON® Magazine* #240.

Unlike Scholar Priests, Scholar Monks may discard their kit should they begin to question their faith and their role within the monastery.

Scholar Monks must have a Wisdom of at least 10 and an Intelligence of 12 or more. They must be Lawful Good or Lawful Neutral.

Barred: Monks must follow the Christian faith.

Role: Often, a Scholar Monk travels to visit the subjects he is studying. This may lead them on long journeys of discovery. This, and the respect they command as neutral observers, provides much scope for players wishing to use this kit for their Priest character.

Secondary Skills: Scholar Monks must take the Scribe secondary skill.

Weapon Proficiencies: Although pacifism is generally part of the vows each monk is required to make, carrying a staff for defense is permitted. This is the only weapon a Scholar Monk is permitted to gain proficiency in.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Reading/Writing (Latin and native tongue), Artistic Ability (illumination and calligraphy). *Recommended:* Agriculture, Ancient History, Astrology, Etiquette, Healing, Herbalism, Local History, Religion, Singing.

Equipment: A Scholar Monk may own nothing due to his vows. He may be permitted to retain certain items for personal use by his monastery (such as Cadfael's books on herbal lore), but these are exceptions to the rule. Initially, a Scholar Monk character has a staff, his robes, a prayer book, and a simple crucifix, but all of these items remain the property of the monastery rather than the individual monk himself. Scholar Monks may never wear armor.

Special Benefits: As with Scholar Priests, a Scholar Monk may spend any or all of his weapon proficiency slots on nonweapon proficiencies instead. In

addition, a Scholar Monk is never refused food, shelter, or aid by one who follows the Christian faith. If they require coin or equipment to perform some task they have been assigned, they may request the items from the abbot of their monastery, who usually grants such requests unless they are extravagant or the task for which they are to be used is in conflict with the interests of the monastery itself. By the late eighth century, the resources a monastery could draw upon were pretty impressive.

Special Hindrances: As has been mentioned before, a Scholar Monk may not own any equipment. Monies they gain must be donated, in full, to their monastery. They must also uphold their faith at all times. A lapse means that they lose all spellcasting ability until some form of atonement (usually including the casting of an *atonement* spell) takes place.

Wealth Options: Monks do not begin play with any form of monetary wealth.

Races: Any individual of any race that is willing to take his vows and live a faithful life as a monk may take this kit.

Tribal Priest

Description: This kit may be used to represent the pagan priests of any non-Christian culture of the Dark Ages. This includes non-Christian Anglo-Saxons, Picts, and Scandinavians, along with Britons who have turned away from Christianity to return to their old gods. Although often seen as barbaric to the Christian church, the cultures served by the Tribal Priest have largely discarded the typical trappings of barbarism, serving a community just as, or at least approaching, the measure of civilization evident in their Christian neighbors.

A Tribal Priests ability score requirements, alignment, and other special benefits and hindrances are determined by his deity. Good sources for possible deities followed by a Tribal Priest include *HR1 Vikings, HR3 Celts, Legends and Lore* (Celtic and Norse chapters), *Faiths & Avatars*, and *Powers & Pantheons*.

Barred: Tribal priests may not be Christian in faith.

Role: Tribal priests are the most akin to traditional AD&D game Priests in that they worship one or more deities, and gain their spells and powers from those deities. They are highly influential individuals, often having more influence over the population than the king himself. In a Dark Ages campaign, Tribal Priests engage in politics and quests in the name of their gods. They also must defend their faith (and position within their community) from the onset of Christianity represented by the ministrations of the Christian missionaries, who often attempt to convert the pagan masses.

Secondary Skills: A Tribal Priest must select a secondary skill that is relevant to the deity he worships.

Weapon Proficiencies: A Tribal Priest is restricted in weapon proficiency depending on the description provided for the deity he worships.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Etiquette, Reading/Writing, Religion.

Equipment: No special restrictions are placed upon a Tribal Priest, other than those proscribed by the specific deity he worships.

Special Benefits: Tribal Priests may attempt to counter the conversion ability of a Christian missionary, as long as they are present and in good standing with the subject of the conversion. In this function, they may add their Charisma reaction bonus as a negative modifier to the missionary's initial reaction roll. Once a missionary has been accepted, however, it is only their influence within their community that is applicable.

Beyond that, a Tribal Priest gains the special abilities provided by the deity he follows.

Special Hindrances: Tribal Priests must work hard to maintain their influence within their community, especially in the face of potential conversion by Christian missionaries. Should their people be converted, a Tribal Priest has the option to turn to Christianity himself, attempt to disrupt or discredit the practitioners of the new faith, or leave his people in a form of self exile.

Of course, any special hindrances or restrictions due to the Tribal Priest's own faith must also be observed.

Wealth Options: Unless otherwise indicated, Tribal Priests begin play with the standard 3d6 × 10 gp. Funds remaining after purchase of initial equipment may be converted into land.

Races: Any pagan culture of any race is eligible for this kit.

Rogue Kits

Most Rogue player characters in a Dark Ages campaign are wandering freemen adventurers or those unfortunates who have been forced (or who have chosen) to follow a life of banditry. Such individuals may band together for mutual support, or because they have no other choice, but the traditional notion of thieves' guilds (and thus such other indicators of organized units of crime, such as Thieves' Cant) are, by and large, obsolete in a Dark Ages setting.

Thieves thus tend to be wilderness oriented, requiring survival skills necessary to live outside the stockades of civilization. Skills such as lock picking and trap detection are virtually worthless in this environment, especially considering the technology level of security present.

Although the Dark Ages Thief, given the above challenges, enjoys few of the roles the class holds in other AD&D settings, the lot of the Bard is a completely different matter. The old Welsh order of bards, affiliated with the druids of an older time, are still present and command a great deal of respect. The Anglo-Saxons also placed great worth on their tale-tellers, being at once keepers of lore, recorders of deeds, and purveyors of news throughout the kingdoms. Even the skalds of the Scandinavian people hold positions of reverence and respect within their culture.

Kits from Existing Sources

Although many of the traditional roles of the Thief are not present within the Dark Ages setting, a few of the kits presented in the *Complete Thief's Handbook* remain relevant to the campaign. Adventurers, Bandits, Buccaneers, and Scouts all fit well and are available to players of Thief characters.

The *Complete Bard's Handbook* has fewer kits of relevance to the setting, but the position afforded by the status of the class within the cultures of the Dark Ages campaign provide bards with greater opportunities for adventure than their subtler cousins. The Loremaster kit can be applied to bards of both Celtic and Anglo-Saxon cultures, and the Skald kit should be taken by all Bards with a Scandinavian background. In addition, *The Complete Bard's Handbook* provides details for the 1st-Edition AD&D Bard.

The dual-classed, druidic nature of this class makes it ideal for representing the highly respected Bards present in Welsh and Irish Celtic cultures.

Rustler

Class: Thief

Description: Second to land, livestock represents the most important commodity in the Anglo-Saxon economy. Theft of land is the province of armed forces, but theft of livestock requires those subtler qualities possessed by the Thief class. Livestock theft was a common problem for the cultures of the Dark Ages, especially since loss of food and work animals often carried disastrous implications to the community suffering such predation.

This means that the act of livestock theft is one of high risk. At the least, anyone caught rustling will find his life forfeit. At worst, such theft may instigate the mustering of armed forces with the intent of burning the offender's home settlement to the ground. The possible returns for such activity, however, are great. Several common farm holders managed to raise themselves into the ranks of the nobility on the gains reaped through the practice of livestock theft.

Role: Rustler characters might be owners of farms who wish to raise their lot in life, or they might be professional thieves who work for some second party. They tend to be hard-bitten individuals, immune to the harm they inflict on their victims, their minds set on the personal rewards their actions might bring.

Rustlers can be used in several different ways within a Dark Ages campaign. The player characters may belong to a group of Rustlers, making a living by planning and executing livestock thefts. Conversely, they may be employed by a worried farmer or community to defend livestock from Rustlers, or to track down missing livestock after a successful raid.

Secondary Skills: Animal related skills are essential to the Rustler. Thus, they may possess the secondary skills of Farmer, Hunter, or Trapper/Furrier.

Weapon Proficiencies: Given the importance of livestock in the Dark Ages, attempted theft rarely results in anything other than conflict. Rustlers are thus restricted in weapon choice only by their culture.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Animal Handling. *Recommended:* Animal Lore, Animal Training, Riding (Land-based), Rope Use, Tracking.

Skill Progression: A Rustler concentrates on skills that allow him to sneak into livestock compounds (Move Silently, Hide in Shadows), avoid any snares or similar traps that may be set to protect his targets (Find/Remove traps), and to track the movement of guards and animals in the dark nights that are his preferred time to strike (Detect Noise). Note that Rustlers gain fewer points to spend on Thief abilities than other Rogues.

Equipment: To carry out their chosen profession, Rustlers tend to equip themselves with a decent amount of rope. If a large amount of livestock is the target of a particular raid, a rustler may also hide a saddled mount nearby to better drive his prize back to his home.

Special Benefits: Rustlers may control groups of domestic animals through use of the Animal Handling nonweapon proficiency. In addition to the normal effects possible with the proficiency, Rustlers may also excite domestic animals into performing controlled stampedes. If a successful Animal Handling check is made upon attempting such a feat, the rustler may direct the stampede in any direction he desires (within the limits of the movement capabilities of the animals in question). Such stampedes may thus be used to break fencing, trample guards, and quickly move the animals away from the steadings of their former owners. See the entry for herd animals in the *Monstrous Manual*™ book to determine the possible capabilities of a stampede.

Special Hindrances: Rustlers gain only 40 points to spend on Thief abilities initially, but gain the full 30 points per level thereafter. They may still spend a maximum of 30 points on a single ability at 1st-level.

Rustlers strive for absolute success in their endeavors. If caught in the act, they are generally killed by hanging. Should they be recognized, and a complaint brought to their lord, it is likely that they are shown the same justice, since the lord would probably rather avoid a war over livestock for the sake of a bunch of Thieves. Of course, that same lord would be quite happy to see new livestock coming into his lands, as long as the risk to his own holdings is minimal.

Races: Any human or alfar character may become a Rustler.

Thief Skills Adjustments: Rustlers have the following base Thief ability scores:

Pick Pockets	0%
Open Locks	10%
Find/Remove Traps	10%
Move Silently	10%
Hide in Shadows	10%
Detect Noise	10%
Climb Walls	40%
Read Languages	*

* This ability is never gained

Storyteller

Class: Bard

Speciality: Teller of legend, keeper of lore.

Qualifications: Storytellers must possess a Wisdom score of 9 or more, in addition to the standard Bard class ability requirements.

Introduction: "Aye, harper I am—the harper to the King's hall! Ne'er did folk need the glorious tales of the old heroes as they do in these dark days. Rally all to the saga of the great king of the Geats—Beowulf, the slayer of the dark Grendel! Draw from the courage of our blood, and draw ye closer yet to this ember that fires the hearts of all true warriors within. Battle is but the hour of dawn awakening, but be ye strong in spear and shield, for 'tis the red of God's own enemies that shall paint the fields of war's harvest. Draw ye closer, and listen."

Description: Storytellers are the Bards of the Anglo-Saxons. Their duties to their lord are manyfold, from the inspiration of the fyrd, to the provision of background music during feasts. They keep the lore of their people alive within their culture, an important role considering the lack of literacy that pervades all levels of Anglo-Saxon society outside the clergy. They often assume the role of diplomats, advisors, and messengers, individuals of charisma and knowledge who can pass on the lessons of history to those, friend and foe alike, that listen to their words.

Role: The Storyteller is an important figure in Anglo-Saxon culture. As player characters, Storytellers may wander the land, gathering and passing on news and lore wherever they visit. They may, on the other hand, be the

Oral tradition becomes written chronicle when Anglo-Saxon Bards befriend literate Scholar Monks.

advisors of thegns, eoldermen, or kings, called upon to advise and inspire when battles must be fought, or judgements must be made.

Secondary Skills: Storytellers may have any secondary skill but are rarely scribes, relying mainly on the oral tradition their profession thrives upon.

Weapon Proficiencies: Storytellers are limited in weaponry by their culture. They may become proficient in the use of the spear, the seax (short sword), the scramasax (dagger), and the bow (long or short).

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Singing, Musical Instrument (harp, whistle flute, or lyre). *Recommended:* Ancient History, Languages (Ancient and Modern), Local History

Armor/Equipment: Storytellers are not limited in armor, equipment, or weapons.

Special Benefits & Hindrances: Storytellers have all the standard abilities of the Bard class, as described in the *Player's Handbook*, with the following exceptions. They are limited in spell use to spells from the Divination and Enchantment/Charm schools. They do not gain the Thief abilities of Pick Pockets and Read Languages, although they retain the same number of discretionary points as standard Bards. Finally, a Storyteller uses the Priest group THAC0 instead of that used by Rogues.

Thief Skills Adjustments: Storytellers possess the following base Thief ability scores:

Pick Pockets	*
Detect Noise	10%
Climb Walls	30%
Read Languages	*

* This ability is never gained

Campaigning in the Dark Ages

So your appetite for the Dark Ages has been whetted, and you want to start a campaign based on these themes? The following sections offer advice to those DMs wishing to base a campaign on the world of the Anglo-Saxons.

Historical vs. Fantasy Campaigns

The main benefit of creating a historical campaign is the sheer amount of research material available. The main downside, ironically, is the amount of work required to ensure a coherent campaign consistent with the history. Of course, even within a historical campaign, you need not stick entirely to actual events.

On the other hand, a fantasy campaign gives you free reign to include whatever you desire. The downside is the lack of resources for such a game.

In general, a historical campaign requires more reading, while a fantasy campaign requires more writing.

Campaign Conflicts and Themes

The Dark Ages were a period of much conflict, both spiritual and physical. A glance at the timeline reveals only the surface of the variety of conflicts in Anglo-Saxon Britain.

Britons vs. Britons: As the Roman legions withdraw, the struggle for power begins. In the early days, this conflict might represent the aspirations of certain individuals to impose their regime over the old province of Britannicus. In the days leading up to the Anglo-Saxon invasion, these struggles become a matter of survival as plague and famine strike. Characters caught up in these conflicts might be vassals of an aspirant to Britannicus or active opponents of one; they might even have aspirations of power themselves. As matters deteriorate, they might operate as the guardians of a group of Britons, aiding the survival of their people where they can.

Britons vs. Pirates: Saxon, Irish, and Pictish pirates ravaged the Britons for many years after the withdrawal of Rome. In their role as protectors, a Briton party might attempt to ward off such attacks. On the other hand, perhaps the characters are pirates themselves, bent on stealing one more piece of the fading Roman legacy.

Anglo-Saxons vs. Britons: The characters might take roles on either side of the invasion—as Britons trying to defend against the Saxons (and perhaps changing the course of history), or as part of the various Germanic attackers. A small group could act as advance scouts, spying out the locations and dispositions of the enemy. This conflict also opens the possibility of introducing Arthur, either as Ambrosius or as another incarnation.

Anglo-Saxons vs. Anglo-Saxons vs. Britons vs. Picts: This is perhaps the conflict that offers the most scope within the Dark Ages campaign. It represents the struggle among the post-invasion kingdoms for supremacy and survival. Within Anglo-Saxon culture, the characters could operate as vassals of an eolderman, the witan, or even their king as the race toward the crown of a united England begins. They could engage in diplomatic missions to other kingdoms, take part in military operations, or head out on quests for artifacts of legend from earlier periods of Celtic and Roman dominance within Britain.

Humans vs. Nonhumans: Despite the preponderance of humans in a typical Dark Ages campaign, this conflict provides several opportunities. The defense of trade and communication routes against the erlking, goblins, and other humanoids living in the wilderness, dire plots hatched by the fey and dockalfen, and other such possibilities exist. Richard Wagner's story of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ("The Ring of the Dwarves"), although not Anglo-Saxon, gives an interesting theme for a campaign, as dwarves, humans, and the gods themselves battle for mastery, through intrigue and war, for artifacts of great magical power.

Pagan vs. Christian: The early period of the Anglo-Saxon invasion and settlement produced a bewildering array of religious conflicts. The Britons were Christianized during the Roman occupation, but the hardships suffered after the withdrawal caused some to revert to the older Celtic faith of their ancestors. The Anglo-Saxons brought their own brand of pagan religion, imposing it upon the people they conquered. Add to the mix the missionaries from the Celtic and Roman Christian churches, and the scope for religious confusion can add an interesting theme to a campaign. An interesting twist could be to have a Christian priest operating within a pagan environment, as he tries to prove the worth of his own faith over the established religion of those he chooses as companions.

Other Concepts

Arthur: King Arthur is the best known contemporary figure of the Dark Ages, mainly through the myths and legends that have grown around him over the centuries. In history, the best candidate for the real-life Arthur is Ambrosius Aurelianus, possibly the last remaining Roman military commander in Britain. But there is no reason why an AD&D Dark Ages campaign shouldn't go beyond the historical and introduce some element of the myth behind the man. In your game, maybe Arthur is not Ambrosius but another, more fantastic individual. Arthur has his place, should you wish to use him, in nearly every concept of a Dark Ages campaign.

Rome: Rome is dying. A mere century after the withdrawal of the legions from Britain, the Empire was no more. But Rome still has some important considerations to bring to a Dark Ages campaign.

Roman technology, for instance, was superior to any possessed by the cultures in the British Isles. Although not particularly true to a historically correct campaign, part of the quest for power could involve the recovery of items of Roman craft. Perhaps, in addition to technology, the magic used in Roman society could likewise have been more advanced and refined, giving rise to the search for the few items of power, and possibly even books of magical lore, that remained hidden after the withdrawal.

Ian Malcomson is a freelance technical writer who also writes for historical and archaeological projects. A gamer for twenty years and a member of the UK RPGA® Network, this is his first roleplaying article.

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by Lance Hawvermale
illustrated by David Kooharian

Fighting With Flair

Beyond Hack & Slash Warriors

This is the stuff of which warriors are made. The metallic cry of sword against shield, the tremor of a charger's hooves, the sweat on sculpted muscle, and the clamor of arms: these are the hallmarks of AD&D® game Warriors, the images that their names and legends conjure in the mind. Muscle over matter. Sinew and steel.

Or is it?

What about the cat-nimble Warrior who invests in speed and stealth rather than bulk and brute force? Or the mystic Fighter who dwells not in the realm of thunderous battle but in a higher place, where thought is synonymous with action, and the mind rather than the sword is the primary weapon? These, too, are Fighters, perhaps even deadlier than their more mundane counterparts. The role of the Fighter need not be pedestrian. The life and times of your Fighter PC can be just as ornamental and unexpected as the most multi-faceted Mage or colorful Rogue.

To make a more interesting Warrior, envision the character you wish to create even before you generate his ability scores. Have a firm idea of the PC's outlook and personality before you roll a single die. Then proceed to the list of Fighter options presented in *Skills & Powers*. To add a few choices, here are some new options exclusively for the Fighter class. If your campaign doesn't use the PLAYER'S OPTION® rules, any of these abilities may instead be purchased as nonweapon proficiencies as per standard 2nd-Edition rules. The point cost or proficiency slot cost is included, as is the relevant ability score for each skill.

New Skills & Powers

Anomalous Intuition (10 CPs or 2 proficiency slots; Wisdom): Like many heroes of literature and myth, this Warrior maintains an unexplained connection with some mysterious power or magical entity. Perhaps he has divine parentage, as did Hercules, or maybe his mother was years ago blessed by fairy folk, and the Warrior still—perhaps unknowingly—carries this blessing. At the least, the character has a distant kinship with elves or a similar magical race, and retains an echo of their power.

Whether he is aware of its origins or not, the Warrior with Anomalous Intuition has the uncanny ability to detect things that are normally beyond the range of mortal perception. By simply passing within a few feet of a secret door, the character has a 1-in-6 chance of sensing its existence, or a 1-in-3 chance if the Warrior is an elf. Furthermore, his hunches or his "gut" guide him when danger is afoot. The Warrior possesses the equivalent of the Trouble Sense proficiency, as detailed in *PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics*.

Athleticism (10 CPs or 2 slots; Dexterity): A Warrior with this talent is the physical epitome of the epic Greek athletes of ancient Athens. Robust and naturally fit, a Fighter with this skill is capable of heroic feats of bodily prowess and puissance. He epitomizes the animal grace of the human form. As a result of his strength and agility, the Warrior receives a +2/+10% bonus to all checks involving running, jumping, throwing, and climbing. Furthermore, he can purchase the Endurance proficiency for half the standard cost.

Blood Oath (5 CPs or 1 slot; Wisdom): Much like the Ranger's special racial enmity, this option allows the player to select a certain type of creature as his character's blood enemy. Whenever he is faced with his chosen foe, the Warrior enjoys a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. However, his hatred toward this enemy is so great that it requires an enormous effort of willpower to resist an opportunity to combat his foe. If the Warrior wishes to avoid a confrontation, he must first make a Wisdom/Willpower check to see if he has the force of will to turn around and walk away. If he fails, his Blood Oath gets the best of him, and he charges forward, teeth bared and weapons flashing.

Combat Sense (10 CPs or 2 slots; Wisdom): By selecting this skill, the Fighter enjoys an innate kinship with the pulse of battle, enabling him to act with more precision and accuracy than others who are less comfortable in melee situations. He receives a +1 bonus in three different combat situations:

- Fighting in the dark (reducing the penalty to –3 instead of the standard –4, or –1 if the Warrior also knows the Blindfighting nonweapon proficiency).
- Attacking opponents who are partially or wholly concealed (reducing all penalties by 1, as per *Player's Handbook*).
- Surprise (the Fighter's chances of being surprised are reduced by 1 in 10).

Comitatus (5 CPs or 1 slot; Charisma): By purchasing this option, the Warrior is essentially entering his character into a feudal contract. The exact interpretation of this pact is the domain of the DM, but the Comitatus generally entitles the character to a special favor or privilege from his liege lord or other powerful NPC. For example, in return for protecting the region from local brigands, the Fighter can expect food and lodging from the

New Skills & Powers

Ability	CPs	#Slots	Relevant Ability
Anomalous Intuition	10	2	Wisdom
Athleticism	10	2	Dexterity
Blood Oath	5	1	Wisdom
Combat Sense	10	2	Wisdom
Comitatus	5	1	Charisma
Concentrated Strength	5	1	Strength
Coup de Gras	10	2	Strength
Heroic Boast	5	1	Charisma
Iaijutsu	5	1	Dexterity
Mettle	10	2	Constitution
Mythic Lore	10	2	Intelligence
War Cry	5	1	Constitution

baron of the land. On a greater scale, a Warrior in command of his own castle may be responsible for the housing and upkeep of several platoons of the king's army. In exchange, he is granted legal protection and various privileges normally reserved exclusively for nobility.

Comitatus was the old Danish practice of swearing brotherhood between a thane and his vassals. Certain duties were expected of the vassal, but in return for his loyalty, he could expect an occasional favor from his lord. The player is encouraged to develop a story behind this relationship and should manipulate the Comitatus to be consistent with the campaign. Comitatus is not restricted to a lord and his vassal; the player is free to form the Comitatus with any appropriate NPC: guildmaster, sage, city alderman, etc. As long as he is faithful to the relationship, the character can expect an occasional petty favor from his benefactor, as governed by the DM.

Concentrated Strength (5 CPs or 1 slot; Strength): Though he might not be capable of sudden bursts of intense power, the Warrior choosing this option can apply a great deal of muscle to a single task requiring concentration and will. In effect, this is the difference between the Open Doors check (which requires a quick application of motion and muscle) and the Bend Bars percentage (which relies upon a deep inner focus and the steady increase of continuous pressure). By opting for this ability, the character doubles his normal chances of Bending Bars and Lifting Gates.

Coup de Gras (10 CPs or 2 slots; Strength): The Coup de Gras is the Warrior's signature strike, the stroke of grace that ends combat with a single blow and inspires Bards to compose epic poetry, romanticizing the battle. If the critical hit rules from *Combat & Tactics* are in use, the Coup de Gras translates into a considerable bonus to the Warrior who succeeds in scoring a critical strike. Before rolling for the severity of the blow, the Warrior makes a Strength/Muscle check. If successful, his weapon is considered to be one size larger than usual, so that a size M longsword is now size L, while a two-handed sword is considered a size H weapon for purposes of critical hits.

If the critical hit tables are not in effect, the warrior with the Coup de Gras power is still entitled to additional damage whenever his attack roll is a natural 18, 19, or 20 and is at least five points above the required roll to hit. In these cases, the Warrior inflicts double damage.

Heroic Boast (5 CPs or 1 slot; Charisma): Much like mythic Beowulf, a fighter with this option has the ability to rouse the morale of his comrades. By uttering a brief, passionate oration on his prowess in battle and the glory to be won, a Fighter can inspire friendly NPCs, granting them a +2 to morale for the duration of the upcoming struggle, so long as the Fighter is leading them. This skill should be roleplayed by the player to be effective.

Iaijutsu (5 CPs or 1 slot; Dexterity): As adapted from the 1st-Edition *Oriental Adventures* rulebook, Iaijutsu allows the Warrior to unsheath his weapon with startling speed. A successful Dexterity/Balance check means that the Warrior suffers no delay in terms of game rounds when removing or returning his weapon from and to its scabbard.

Mettle (10 CPs or 2 slots; Constitution): Like many legendary heroes, the Warrior with this natural gift possesses a nearly indestructible frame; indeed, he seems to be cast of iron. With bones that are inherently resilient, this character has a Herculean fortitude that allows him to resist the punishment of bludgeoning weapons and falling damage. Any damage from these attack forms is halved if the Warrior makes a successful Constitution/Fitness check.

Mythic Lore (10 CPs or 2 slots; Intelligence): In his youth, this Fighter spent many sleepless nights listening to the tales of magnificent Warriors and their weapons. The Fighter now has a 5% chance per level of knowing the history of any magical or legendary weapon or piece of armor, as well as facts concerning the known owners of those items.

War Cry (5 CPs or 1 slot; Constitution): By uttering a withering battle cry seconds before striking, a Fighter with this skill receives a +1 bonus to damage rolls for a single strike. This strike must always be the Fighter's first in any combat situation, used as he engages an enemy for the first time. This skill may be used a number of times per day equal to the character's level, but never more than once in any battle.

New Restrictions

As a counterbalance to these skills and talents, several new restrictions are now available to assist players in tailoring their characters. When choosing these restrictions, players should keep in mind their ultimate goals for the character from a roleplaying point of view. Restrictions should not be chosen simply as a means of acquiring additional CPs to spend on weapon proficiencies. Players are encouraged to create a story behind each restriction they choose. What happened in the Fighter's past that now makes him hesitant to attack an unarmed opponent? What is the relationship he has with his chosen dependent? Restrictions are important roleplaying tools.

New Restrictions

Restriction	CPs
Dependent	5
Fragility	10
Glass Jaw	5
Night Blindness	5
No Retreat	10
Qualm	5
Short-winded	5
Weakness	5

Dependent (5): A Fighter laboring under this restriction is limited in his actions by a young child or elderly relative who depends upon the PC for at least a portion of his livelihood. The limitations placed upon a PC by such a dependent are obvious. Perhaps the warrior must support the dependent financially (anywhere from 10 to 100 gold pieces per month, depending on the affluence of the campaign), or he has an obligation to stay close to home in case he's needed. In the worst-case scenario, the dependent could become the victim of one of the Warrior's enemies.

Fragility (10): Due to a serious vitamin deficiency during his youth, the

Warrior's bone structure is unnaturally weak. Very much aware of his frail condition, the Warrior stubbornly seeks to overcome his debilitating weakness. The character suffers double damage from all bludgeoning attacks, as well as from falls from any height.

Glass Jaw (5) Much like the Fragility restriction, this option manifests itself in the Warrior's increased susceptibility to bludgeoning damage. Prone to blackouts, a character with this restriction is twice as likely to be knocked unconscious as the result of an unarmed combat attack, as per the punching and wrestling rules in Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook.* Furthermore, any severe head trauma also carries a greater risk of unconsciousness. A fall from any height greater than 10 feet results in a 25% chance that the character is struck unconscious; any critical hit to the head knocks him out for 1d6 rounds.

Night Blindness (5): This restriction increases the Warrior's penalties when fighting in near-dark or lightless environments. Due to a physiological deficiency, the character suffers a –4 attack penalty in twilight conditions and –8 in total darkness.

No Retreat (10): A Warrior with this restriction can never run from combat, regardless of the odds. Driven by an unremitting sense of honor, the character must always fight as long as someone challenges him. Retreat is tantamount to death. Like the wolf, this Warrior wins every fight but one, and in that one he dies.

Qualm (5): Though he may be a fearless combatant, there is one thing that invariably causes the Fighter to hesitate. Due to some emotional unrest or moral code, the Warrior sometimes refuses to act, even in his own best interest. A list of potential qualms includes the following:

† Refuses to strike a woman.
† Cannot attack an enemy from behind.
† Will not fight an unarmed opponent.
† Believes it is a disgrace to his honor to travel in disguise.

Only in the most extreme circumstances could a Warrior ever overcome his particular Qualm, such as in a situation where his inaction would result in the certain death of a friend. Even then, a successful Wisdom/Willpower check is required to surmount his Qualm.

Short-winded (5): The Short-winded Warrior is quickly exhausted by extensive demands on his respiratory system. Whenever a Constitution/Fitness check is called for by the DM, the player suffers a –4 penalty to the roll. If the fatigue rules from *Combat & Tactics* are in effect, the player receives only half of his standard allotment of fatigue points. This restriction also prohibits the character from purchasing the Endurance proficiency, as the two traits are mutually exclusive.

Weakness (5): Finding himself irresistibly drawn to a petty vice, the Fighter must make a successful Wisdom/Willpower check to avoid succumbing to his instinctual urges whenever he's tempted by his particular weakness. Typical weaknesses include gold, alcohol, gambling, and members of the opposite sex.

Proficiencies from Other Sources

There are many nonweapon proficiencies from sourcebooks other than the *Complete Fighter's Handbook* and *Skills & Powers* that a Fighter can utilize to give his character added dimension. Players are encouraged to peruse the gamut of the Complete Handbook series and select a variety of "unfighterlike" abilities. Even a proficiency so bizarre as Fungi Recognition has its uses in defining the idiosyncrasies of your Fighter. The list below contains but a few examples of useful proficiencies from other sources.

Complete Book of Dwarves: Intimidation, Slow Respiration, Sound Analysis

Complete Book of Humanoids: Close-quarter Fighting, Drinking, Eating, Wild Fighting

Complete Bard's Handbook: Chanting, Poetry, Whistling/Humming

Complete Gladiator's Handbook: Arena Acting, Dirty Tricks, Massage, Tactics, Taunting, Weakness Identification

Complete Ninja's Handbook: Enamor, Escape, Night Vision, Toxicology

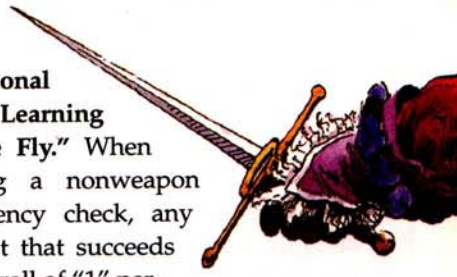
Complete Paladin's Handbook: Diagnostics, Jousting, Oratory

Complete Ranger's Handbook: Falconry, Spelunking

Complete Thief's Handbook: Fast-talking, Looting, Observation

DARK SUN® rules: Armor Optimization, Weapon Improvisation

AL-QADIM® rules: Awareness, Display Weapon Prowess, Metalworking



Optional Rule: "Learning on the Fly." When making a nonweapon proficiency check, any attempt that succeeds with a roll of "1" permanently increases that particular ability by one point, as the character gained new insight into the skill during its application.

Skills & Powers Kit Conversions

There may come a time in an ongoing campaign when it becomes necessary to convert regular 2nd-Edition rules to the PLAYER'S OPTION format. This is especially true when dealing with the invaluable *Complete Barbarian's Handbook.* This sourcebook is rich in information for the player who favors the Warrior classes. In addition, the many kits presented in the other Warrior handbooks—Fighter, Paladin, and Ranger—can all likewise be converted for PLAYER'S OPTION play. To assist DMs in updating these rules, the following guidelines are presented as examples for altering standard-rules character kits to the *Skills & Powers* format.

In addition to the CP cost, all kit-based abilities come with a price. Included in the descriptions of each kit are several "Special Hindrances" that can be used to balance these options. It is recommended that for each ability chosen, the player must also assume a particular hindrance. These talents and hindrances are fully described in the appropriate handbooks.

Barbarians

Barbarian characters of the *Complete Barbarian's Handbook* begin character creation with 25 CPs. They have access to the following Fighter options: Defense Bonus (10), Followers (5/10), Leadership (5), Magic Resistance (10), Poison Resistance (5), Spell Resistance (5), and Weapon Specialization (5). Additionally, any of the new options presented in this article are also appropriate for the Barbarian character.

Barbarians may also use their allotted CPs to select from several skills that are unique to their own sub-class. These particular abilities are detailed in the *Complete Barbarian's Handbook* and include Movement (5), Leaping and

Springing (5), Back Protection (5), and Climbing (10).

As another option, DMs can include 1d12+2 for hit points (10). This option can be seen as the natural progression of the "hit point option" as found in *Skills & Powers*. To maintain the Barbarian's high hit-point mystique, players should be allowed to select this option, unless the DM deems that it overpowers the character class.

Cavaliers

The Cavalier begins play with 35 CPs. Not only does he have access to all available Fighter options, he may also select from the following abilities unique to the Cavalier kit: To-hit Bonuses (5), Saving Throw Bonuses (5), Fear Immunity (5), Warhorse (5), Reaction Adjustment (5), and Obligated Shelter (5). These special benefits, as well as the corresponding hindrances, are fully detailed in the *Complete Fighter's Handbook.*

Rangers

The various kits from the *Complete Ranger's Handbook* are all suitable for PLAYER'S OPTION conversions. Some examples include the Beastmaster, Feralan, Forest Runner, Greenwood Ranger, and Sea Ranger. All Rangers making use of a kit receive 75 CPs, to be dispersed among the standard abilities of their class, as well as their unique, kit-based talents.

Beastmaster: The Beastmaster's manifold skills are simple to convert to a PLAYER'S OPTION format: Stealth (5), Animal Henchmen (10), Animal Telepathy (5), Animal Bonding (5), and Animal Horde (5). Each of these skills should be tempered with a selection from the Special Hindrances of Beastmasters, as described on page 49 of the *Complete Ranger's Handbook.*

Feralan: The Feralan PC is unlikely to possess such nonweapon proficiencies as Reading/Writing or any of the fine craft skills such as Weaponsmithing and Carpentry. He also disdains most steel armor, making Armor Restriction a natural choice for this Ranger. All of the optional skills presented above can be chosen by the Feralan, with the exception of Mythic Lore. His own range of options include Stealth (5), Feral Rage (5), Climbing (5), Speak With Animals (5), Familial Rapport (5), Animal Training (5), and Call of the Wild (5).

Forest Runner: Like the Feralan, the Forest Runner tends to prefer light, supple armor, such as leather or hide. Being something of a rogue and scofflaw, his repertoire of nonweapon proficiencies often includes several choices from the Rogue list, including Tumbling, Tightrope Walking, and Jumping. Also at the Forest Runner's disposal are the options of Stealth (5), Inspire (10), Disguise (5), and Reaction Bonus (5). The Forest Runner almost certainly opts for the Weapon Restriction hindrance, as his arsenal is often limited to such ready arms as spear, bow, and knife.

Greenwood Ranger: The most unusual of all the Ranger kits, the Greenwood Ranger normally limits his proficiencies to those dealing directly with flora. Like the Druid, the Greenwood Ranger possesses a special penchant for languages of the woodlands; many of his nonweapon proficiency slots might be spent on languages such as Treant and Nymph. His other abilities include the following: Speak With Plants (5), Photosynthesis (5), Buoyancy (5), Rooting (5), and Limbing (10).

Sea Ranger: The Sea Ranger has access to several unique options: Sea Tracking (5), Land Scent (5), Sea Legs (5), Aquatic Combat (5), and Parliament of Fishes (10). Furthermore, the Sea Ranger has unlimited access to all standard Ranger options with the sole exception of Tracking, which doubles in CP cost for this water-based Ranger.

Paladins

The Paladin player normally receives 60 CPs to customize his character. However, if he opts to further expand his PC by choosing a kit from the *Complete Paladin's Handbook,* his CP allotment increases to 75. Some sample kits include the Ghosthunter, Inquisitor, Skyrider, and Wyrmslayer.

Ghosthunter: The Ghosthunter makes frequent use of such non-Warrior proficiencies as Religion, Spellcraft, and Ancient Languages. An exceptionally useful proficiency for the Ghosthunter can be found in *The Complete Book of Necromancers*: Necrology. No Ghosthunter should be without it. The Ghosthunter's own options include Dispel Evil (5), Paralysis Immunity (5), Improved Ability To Turn Undead (10), and Holy Sword Availability (5).

Inquisitor: Inquisitors are by nature more studious than the average Paladin and may have a tendency to select abilities that lend themselves toward investigation rather than combat. While the Inquisitor might neglect the Warrior skill Combat Sense, he would certainly make use of the Blood Oath. Options appropriate for this kit include Detect Evil Magic (5), Immunity to Illusions (10), Immunity to Possession (5), and Mental Control (5). When selecting nonweapon proficiencies, Inquisitors often pay the extra CPs for wizardly talents such as Spellcraft and Ancient Languages—two useful skills when your business is tracking evil sorcerers!

Skyrider: The most obvious distinction between the Skyrider and the standard Paladin is his choice of bonded mount. Skyriders receive equal access to all typical Paladin skills and restrictions, so long as they are consistent with the tactics of a Warrior who spends most of his time airborne. For example, many Skyriders forego the protection of heavy armor and select the Armor Restriction limitation. Skyrider abilities include Combat and Proficiency Bonuses (5), Longer Relationship (5), Faster Training (5), and Telepathic Communication (10).

Wyrmslayer: A favorite among Warriors, the Wyrmslayer kit is not only permitted the full range of standard *Skills & Powers* options for his class but also has access to these skills and benefits, all uniquely his own: Dragon Languages (5), Fear Immunity (5), Damage Bonus (5), and Special Reward (10).

Whether your Fighter is a jungle native and grandmaster of the blowgun, or a nationally acclaimed poet and statesman, these new options and proficiencies should enliven the Warriors of any campaign world. Halfling gladiators, warrior-prophets—the options are truly innumerable. Only one thing is certain: the Fighters of your AD&D campaign world need never be the same!

Lance Hawvermale is a staunch proponent of the power of the pen over the sword. You could say he prefers writing with flair.

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101 Paladin Quests

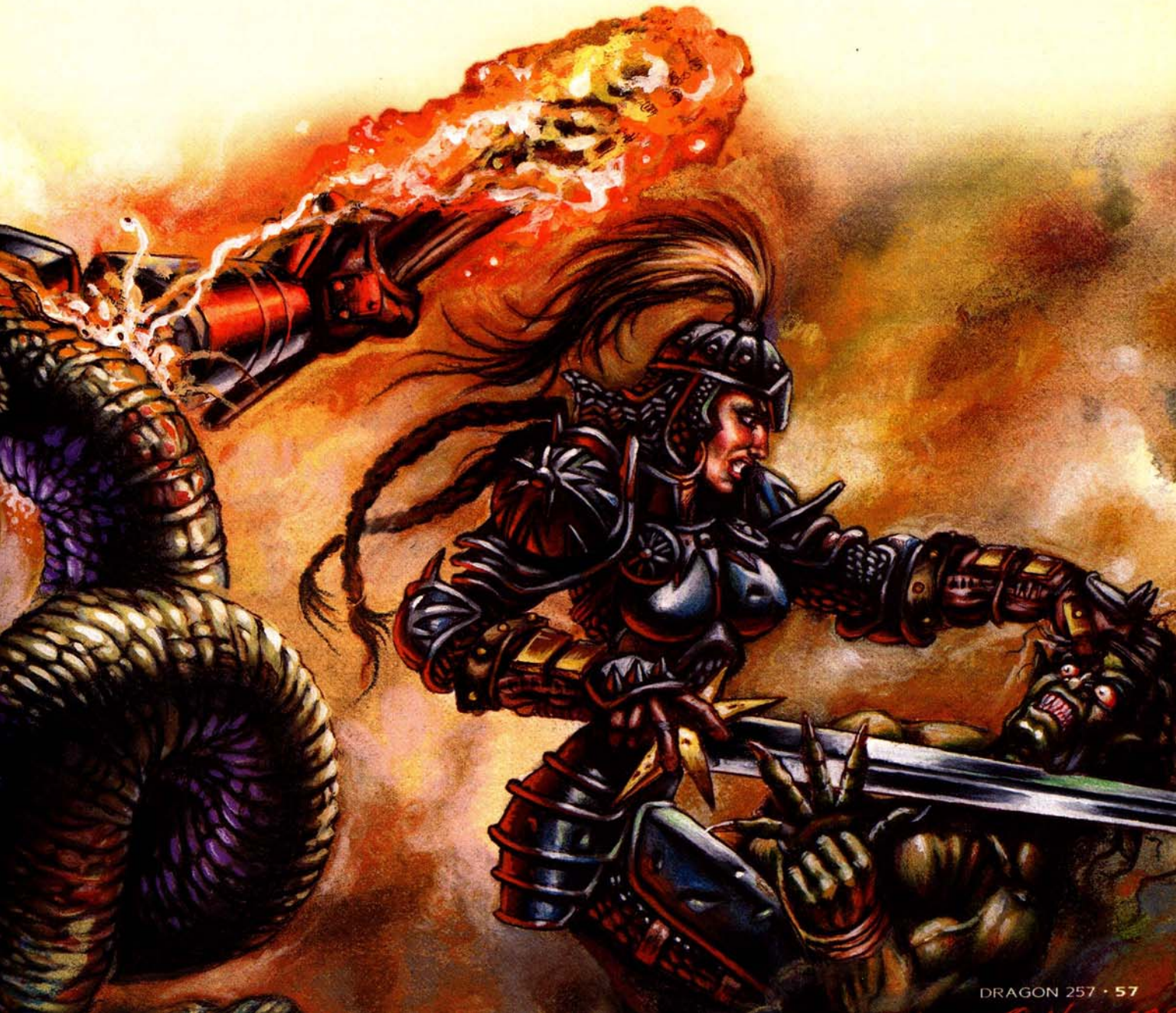
With their strict code of conduct, Paladin characters are arguably some of the most difficult PCs to roleplay accurately in the AD&D® game. They cause all kinds of headaches for the DM as well. They want not only to go on a quest to seek out their bonded mount but also, at some

BY JOHNATHAN M. RICHARDS • ILLUSTRATED BY RON SPENCER

point in their careers, to go on a quest to find a holy sword. *If that weren't bad enough, there are those nasty ethical and alignment restrictions. Every time the poor DM turns around, the Paladin is seeking to undergo a quest to atone for some minor transgression.*

What's the DM to do? He must be able to whip up a suitable quest on a moment's notice. As an aid to the harried DM, here are 101 quests suitable for Paladins. The usefulness of these quests is not limited to Paladins; with proper preparation (possibly replacing a monster or two with creatures appropriate to the party's experience level), each of these quests could become a suitable adventure for nearly any group of player characters (PCs).

The quests are divided into three categories: ***bonded mount*** *quests,* **holy sword** *quests, and quests of* ***atonement****. Some are long and involved, while others are short and to the point. Which one is most appropriate depends upon how long the DM wishes the Paladin to toil at his quest, or (for the quests of atonement) how great a transgression he committed. Similarly, not all bonded mounts and* holy swords *are alike; for the more powerful ones, a more challenging quest is in order.*



BONDED MOUNT QUESTS

1. The Paladin has a recurring dream showing his future mount in the grip of a large carnivore (dragon, chimera, manticore, etc.) and must travel to the site in his dream to be there when the mount is first endangered by the beast.

2. The Paladin's future mount is currently a solid stone statue in a medusa's lair. He must slay the medusa and have a *stone to flesh* spell cast upon the mount.

3. The Paladin is sent to a remote Wizard's tower. The bonded mount is to be created by the Wizard by making a simulacrum of the Paladin himself, then *polymorphing* it into the desired creature. Control of the mount is transferred from the Wizard to the Paladin during the bonding process. The Paladin's bonded mount has mental processes similar to those of the Paladin—the DM might wish to give full control of the mount's actions to the Paladin player.

4. A stone horse is part of the treasure in a wicked ogre's cave. The Paladin must slay the ogre and shatter the stone horse on the ground, at which time a warhorse springs up to serve as the Paladin's mount.

5. A Paladin with the Artistic Ability nonweapon proficiency has an image of the perfect mount in his mind's eye and sees a vision of himself painting the image of his mount with a set of *Nolzur's marvelous pigments*. Finding a set of these magical pigments might be a quest in itself. When the Paladin finishes the painting, the mount springs to life before him. The DM might require the player to draw a picture of his preferred mount.

6. The Paladin's future mount has been *polymorphed* into some fearsome creature believed responsible for recent cattle slayings. The Paladin must return the mount to its natural form and take care of the real culprit —before an angry mob takes matters into its own hands and slays the *polymorphed* mount in error.

7. The Paladin's future mount is a minimal, which must first be captured and then somehow enlarged to standard size.

8. The Paladin must go into a vast forest with no armor and only one weapon. After traveling through the forest for four days, living off the land as best he can, he comes to an open plain. Three days of travel on the plain leads him to a pack of wild horses, one of whom will serve as his bonded mount. This can be a "survive alone against the elements" quest, or the Paladin could encounter a random monster or two on his way to the wild horses.

9. The Paladin is granted the ability to see through the eyes of his future mount, but it is up to him to deduce the mount's location from what he sees.

10. The Paladin's future mount is currently the property of a greedy merchant. It is up to the Paladin to find some way of convincing the merchant to part with it—without violating the Paladin's ethos. (The merchant comes up with all sorts of nasty ideas once he learns that the noble warrior wants something of his—ranging from an obnoxious selling price to a string of "favors" the Paladin must first perform for the merchant.)

11. The Paladin's bonded mount is not yet born, but he feels a pull in a certain direction that leads him on with greater and greater urgency. The mount's birth is difficult, but if the Paladin can make it there in time, he can save the newborn's life and raise the mount as his from birth.

12. The bonded mount can be acquired only through a carefully worded *wish* spell. A *ring of three wishes* is said to be part of the treasure of an ancient wyrm who lairs in the high mountains. If the Paladin can gain the *ring* and return it to his church, one of the three *wishes* will be granted to him.

13. The bonded mount's life energy is imprisoned in a magical globe held by an evil Necromancer, lich, or vampire. The globe must be shattered to restore the mount to physical form.

14. The Paladin's future mount has broken a leg and lies helpless on a mountainside. The Paladin must reach the animal before it becomes victim to predators or the environment, then nurse it back to health.

15. The Paladin's future mount was recently captured by a Wizard who intends to experiment upon the creature in an attempt to understand the process by which magical crossbreeds are created. Depending upon how soon the Paladin reaches the Wizard's fortress and defeats him, he may gain a normal bonded mount or some one-of-a-kind hybrid (part warhorse and part iguana, perhaps, or equal parts warhorse, parrot, and badger).

16. One of a Necromancer's animal zombies was once a warhorse of exceptional quality. If the Paladin can overcome the Necromancer and find a way to restore the warhorse to life, it serves him as his mount.

17. The Paladin's future mount is currently alive as a human—but is destined to be slain and reincarnated as a type of mount. The Paladin might be sent to seek the human, not knowing that the quest he is undertaking leads him to a bonded mount, and an exceptionally intelligent one at that.

18. The Paladin is told he is destined to ride a famous mount who served a member of the Paladin's order centuries ago. The Paladin must seek the site of the famous Paladin's final battle, from which neither Paladin nor mount ever returned. The battle was with a Wizard, whose miscast spell sent a bolt of temporal energy hurtling at the Paladin and mount, throwing them centuries out of time and into the Paladin PC's time. When he arrives, he finds the time-lost Paladin prematurely aged as a result of the spell, and with his dying breath he passes custody of his mount to the PC. The mount did not age as a result of the Wizard's spell and is as strong as he was during the battle centuries ago. The Wizard might still be alive in the PC's time.

19. The mount is a creature from a distant plane, accessible through a magical mirror in the study of a powerful (but not necessarily evil) Wizard. The Paladin might be able to overpower the Wizard

to gain access to the mirror, but if approached amicably (and with appropriate roleplaying), the Wizard might allow the Paladin into the other realm. The specific hazards of the strange, otherworldly realm are left to the DM's imagination.

20. A suitable mount is part of a large group of captured quadrupeds waiting to be fed to a large guardian beast of some sort (an owlbear, displacer beast, or young dragon, perhaps). The beast might be guarding the entrance to a Wizard's lair, a secret organization's meeting place, or possibly the back door to a Thieves' guild headquarters.

21. An appropriate potential bonded mount is the prize at a king's festival. To win it, the Paladin must enter and win a contest pitting him against a variety of competitors. The mock battles are won by first blood, but a few competitors might not be as eager to play by the rules as the Paladin.

22. Six horses have been stolen from a local breeder. If the Paladin can track them down and return them to the owner, he may have his pick of the six, who then serves the Paladin as his bonded mount.

23. The Paladin is sent to an enchanted isle in search of a suitable mount. A group of elves has been poisoned by a toxic substance in the stream from which they drink. If the Paladin comes to their aid, curing them of their afflictions and finding and negating the cause of the poisoning (a small group of heways—see the listing under "Snake" in the *Monstrous Manual*™ book), he is rewarded with a bonded mount unusual for a human—perhaps a unicorn or a moon-horse. (Information on moon-horses can be found in the *Monstrous Compendium® Annual* Volume Two).

24. The Paladin's future mount is not a living creature but a mechanical construct created by a tinker gnome or possibly a Sha'ir (see the section on mechanicals in *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook*). The Paladin might need to help the inventor collect specific materials necessary for the mount's construction, but once built, the mount is a fully intelligent artificial being capable of serving the Paladin as faithfully as a living warhorse.

25. One of the magical powers of the Paladin's *holy sword* is the ability to summon a bonded mount. The Paladin must thrust his sword point-down into the earth at the top of a certain hill at sundown, then kneel in supplication to his god before his *sword* during the night. As the sun rises in the morning, the Paladin's bonded mount approaches. The Paladin might or might not know about this power of his *sword*—and might not yet even have the *sword* when he begins this quest for his mount!

26. The Paladin is sent to the aid of an underwater race (possibly merfolk, tritons, or locathah). After the underwater adventure is complete, the Paladin is given a magical underwater riding mount (giant sea horse or hippocampus), able to *polymorph* into the form of a warhorse when on land. When on land, the creature's mane remains as white as the foam cap of an ocean wave.

27. The Paladin is sent to an ancient ring of megaliths, used for centuries by forest druids. After an evening of prayer, a star falls from the sky and a bonded mount appears in the ring of standing stones, ready to serve the Paladin.

28. The Paladin is sent to excavate the bones of a famous mount in his order's history. Once dug up and reassembled, the Paladin's deity imbues the once-dead creature with life, and it serves the Paladin faithfully as a bonded mount.

29. The Paladin sees a mount being cruelly treated by its current master and must find a way to purchase, trade, or otherwise rescue the beast from the owner. Once this is done, the bonded mount requires a month or so to heal to its full potential.

30. The Paladin's future mount is currently in the form of a painting of a warhorse, kept on the wall of a Wizard's den or hidden among a batch of paintings in the basement of an art museum. The warhorse can be summoned from the painting by the activation of a command word (the horse's name). In addition, the horse is able to return to the painting at will, or activate a *duo-dimension* spell upon itself and its rider, once per day.

31. The Paladin must go to the abandoned island of a magic-wielding sculptor to find his bonded mount. The creature is a life-sized stone carving, but when drops of the Paladin's blood touch the sculpture, its skin softens from rock-hardness to resilient flesh, and the mount comes to life, forever bonded to the Paladin through the blood he shed for it.

32. The Paladin's bonded mount is said to be in a certain meadow on a certain night. When the Paladin goes there, he can hear the creature's breathing and footsteps, but it is nowhere to be seen. If the Paladin looks into a reflective surface, the mount is visible there. The only way to bring the mount into the physical world is to provide a mirror or similar reflective surface large enough to allow the mount to pass through.

33. The Paladin is certain beyond reason that his mount will be found in a wine cellar. When the appropriate wine cellar is located and searched, all that is found is a single piece of paper that radiates Alteration magic. The paper, when folded correctly (origami-style), magically alters into the type of mount into which it was folded. (The DM might wish to provide the player with a piece of paper and have him research the proper method of folding it into the desired shape—any library should have several suitable books on origami.)

HOLY SWORD QUESTS

34. The Paladin must recover a *holy sword* lost at sea during a hurricane. The *sword* now rests in the hold of a sunken ship currently inhabited by weresharks, a giant octopus, or possibly a band of scrags.

35. A *holy sword* is currently in use by a drow noble who is unaware of its higher powers. The Paladin must seek out and defeat the drow if he wishes to have the *sword* for his own.

36. A *holy sword* lies buried to the hilt, unnoticed, between the thick scales of a reptilian gargantua, the top predator of a rocky island chain far to the east. The Paladin must find and slay the great beast in order to claim the *sword*.

37. A *holy sword*, along with the remains of the Paladin who once wielded it, lies at the bottom of a bog patrolled by a will o'wisp. The Paladin must defeat the will o'wisp and find some way of retrieving the *holy sword*.

38. In a section of winding passageways deep under the earth lives a basilisk. Long ago, he slew a Paladin by turning him to stone. The Paladin-turned-statue tipped over and shattered into many pieces, but his right arm, still holding his *holy sword*, remains intact. If the basilisk can be slain and the arm and *sword* recovered, they can be returned to their natural states.

39. A *holy sword* remains in place, watched over by a guardian naga, in a forgotten passageway inside a volcano. The sword will be given to the Paladin, providing he can make it past the red dragon and fire mephits that have since made the volcano their home.

40. The Paladin is led by his deity to the place where a *holy sword* currently resides: each morning the Paladin drops an arrow at his feet and travels in the direction indicated. The DM can make this quest last for as long as desired, drawing the Paladin into all kinds of short adventures in this fashion.

41. The Paladin's *holy sword* is currently one of hundreds of weapons hanging on the wall of a Neutral Evil cloud giant's mountain-top castle, part of a vast display of the weapons of the many heroes who have tried in vain to slay him. The cloud giant keeps a behir as a guard animal.

42. The Paladin is told that his *holy sword* will be found in a certain creature's treasure horde. When the creature is slain, only a chest of gems is discovered. However, one of the gems has been used as the material component of a *Drawmij's instant summons* spell. If activated, the gem summons forth the *holy sword*, currently floating free on the astral plane.

43. A tiny chest inside the lair of a family of jermlaine (and their osquip riding mounts) is really part of a *Leomund's secret chest* spell, although the jermlaine do not realize this. It can be used to summon a larger chest containing the *holy sword* from another remote cave network.

44. The *holy sword* destined for the Paladin's use is currently stashed on a spelljamming vessel, slated to be used as fuel for the vessel's magic-burning furnace.

45. A *holy sword* has been rendered *invisible* and currently lies at the bottom of a well. Living in the well is a water weird, water elemental, or aballin, charged with preventing anyone from gaining access to the *sword*.

46. A *holy sword* lies at the bottom of a cave network, covered in a foot or so of brown, russet, or yellow mold. The Paladin knows that the sword is somewhere in the cave network but doesn't know exactly where. Of course, the network of passages is home to all sorts of nasty creatures.

47. A *holy sword* is kept in an evil sanctuary where unholy rituals are often performed in its presence. The site is guarded by a high-level Warrior wielding an intelligent, Evil sword, and to "rescue" the *holy sword* the Paladin will also have to overcome the many practitioners of the unholy religion.

48. A *holy sword* is imprisoned in the wall of an ice cave, the lair of a remorhaz. Getting to the ice cave, deep in the heart of the frozen northlands, will be as daunting as overcoming the *sword's* current guardian.

49. A *holy sword* is in the hands of a pirate captain who is unaware of its true power. However, getting the sword from him requires hiring a ship filled with enough men to overcome the pirate's own shipload of cutthroats.

50. The *holy sword* destined for the Paladin's use is in the form of a katana and lies in an ogre mage's cave in a land far to the east, where the creatures, customs, and even language are all strange to the Paladin. This quest gives the DM a chance to use some of the unusual creatures and adventures he's never used before.

51. A *holy sword* lies in the lair of a sleeping silver dragon who served the Paladin who last wielded it. If approached correctly, the Paladin might convince the dragon to allow him to wield it and gain a powerful ally in the bargain! However, before handing over the *holy sword*, the dragon requires the Paladin to pass a series of tests to prove his worthiness.

52. Deep in the bowels of the Underdark is an area infested with dozens of undead shadows. The largest of these was once a Paladin, and the *holy sword* he used is now at the bottom of a deep pit along with the other material possessions of the former humans now making up the shadow society. The Paladin must destroy all of the shadows before he can investigate their treasure pit and recover the *holy sword*.

53. A *holy sword* is part of the current inventory making up a metalmaster slug's whirling defenses. (See *Monstrous Compendium Annual*, Volume One for details on this creature.) It lives in an abandoned copper mine that provides passage to the Underdark.

54. A *holy sword* is rumored to be part of the treasure horde of a powerful beholder. If the Paladin defeats the beholder, however, there is no *sword* to be found. That's because the small cube mixed in with the rest of the creature's treasure is really a *Daern's instant fortress*, and once the item is activated (requiring investigation into the item's command word, which the beholder never knew), the *holy sword* is found within one of the rooms of the magical fortress.

55. Deep in the tunnels of the Underdark lives a brain spider of exceptional size. It possesses a *holy sword* (unaware of its true potential in the hands of a Paladin) and used its psionic ability to graft the weapon to one of its front legs. Removing the *sword* from the

spider's anatomy once the creature is slain may require the assistance of a Psionicist. Details of the brain spider are found in the *Monstrous Compendium Annual*, Volume One.

56. There are legends of a powerful sword held by a mysterious woman at the bottom of a lake. She occasionally lifts it up out of the water like Excalibur in the hands of the Lady of the Lake. The sword is a *holy sword*, and the mysterious lady is a nixie, who, having heard of similar legends from the humans her nixie band has captured, uses the *sword* to entice human Warriors to investigate. In this fashion, the nixies have gained many human slaves over the years.

57. A *holy sword* lies among the refuse in the common living area of a band of wererats nesting in the sewers underneath a large city. Because of the silver ornamentation along the hilt and scabbard, the wererats have left it to lie in a corner rather than have one of their Warriors use it. Retrieving it can be an especially daunting task for the Paladin, for whom lycanthropy remains a great fear.

58. The Paladin must find the whereabouts of a *holy sword* that belonged to a fellow member of his order. The *sword* was taken by a band of brigands who attacked the Paladin at night, and they in turn were killed by a band of ogres who brought the *sword* with them to their lair, from which it was stolen by a goblin slave who escaped while the bandits lay in a drunken stupor. The goblin in turn traded the sword for his life when accosted by a trio of gnolls. This little quest can go on and on as the DM sees fit, with the Paladin always one step behind the current wielder of the *holy sword*.

59. A *holy sword* is being used to power a mechanical construct (perhaps a mechanical golem, automaton, or a large autognome) created by a crazed Wizard. The sword is inside the Wizard's creation, and the construct must be destroyed and dismantled to get to it. Being used as a power source has in no way drained the *holy sword* or diminished its effectiveness.

60. A *holy sword* with the special ability to slay vampires was used in a final battle against a powerful vampire. It protrudes from the ribs of the slain undead being, still in the (now skeletal) hands of its former user, who used the *sword* to slay the vampire with his dying breath. However, if the *sword* is removed from the vampire's ribcage, the vile creature returns to its undead state, forcing the *sword's* new wielder into pitched battle with the vampire.

61. During a fierce battle in a wild magic zone, a Paladin's *holy sword* was absorbed into the skin of the giant two-headed troll he was fighting. As a result, the troll was triumphant, but a sword-shaped discoloration remains present on the creature's back to this day. The Paladin must track down this two-headed troll and find a way to restore the *sword* to its normal state, possibly by returning the troll to the wild magic zone.

62. What seems to be a short sword to the iron golem who wields it (at least in respect to the size of the creature) is really a *holy sword*, a fact unbeknownst to the Wizard who created the golem and set it the task of guarding the Wizard's treasure room. As a result, if the *sword* is removed from the golem, or the golem is destroyed in battle, the *holy sword* is drained of all powers. Only a specific series of spells allows the *holy sword* to be removed from the iron golem intact (perhaps a *dispel magic* cast directly on the *sword*, followed by a *limited wish*, after which the golem must be destroyed within one turn). In any case, the Wizard who created the golem is unwilling to dismantle the golem to retrieve the *sword*.

63. A *holy sword* lies at the bottom of a seabed, brought there by a band of crabmen, where it has become part of one of their intricate sculptures. The Paladin must locate the crabmen's dwelling and then pick out the *sword* among the rest of the seaweed-covered metallic items comprising the crabmen's "artwork."

64. A slain Paladin was laid to rest by his adventuring companions, deep in the earth at the site where he was killed. Following what they thought were his beliefs, he was buried in his armor and with his *holy sword* in hand. The body was later discovered by a drow priestess, who, unable to take the *sword* for her own (it caused pain to any evil being trying to grasp it), summoned a crypt thing to guard over the fallen Paladin's body so that such a powerful weapon would be kept out of the hands of those who might wield it. The Paladin must therefore find the tomb and defeat the crypt thing before claiming the *holy sword*.

65. The Paladin is sent to retrieve the *holy sword* wielded in life—and now in undeath—by a former Paladin who has since become a death knight for the vile transgressions and betrayals he performed while alive. The *holy sword* no longer performs the higher functions for the death knight, but the death knight knows full well its true power and will not let it fall into good hands again.

66. A *holy sword*, and the Paladin that once wielded it in life, remain imbedded in a section of living wall making up part of a Chaotic Evil Wizard's subterranean laboratory. There he has created no less than two flesh golems that serve as the Wizard's bodyguards at all times. The living wall must be totally destroyed before the *holy sword* can be regained.

67. A *holy sword* juts from the common neck area of two of a Lernaean hydra's nine heads. The Paladin who used it to cleave halfway through one of the creature's serpentine necks was slain before completing the action, and an extra head sprang up from the partially-severed neck, embedding the *sword* in the creature's body. The creature lives in a vast cave network in the Underdark

Quests of Atonement

68. The Paladin is given a sealed scroll and told to follow a certain road for seven days, giving the scroll to its rightful owner at the end of day seven. ("You'll know him when you see him," he is told.) On the fifth day of his journey, he comes across a crippled beggar heading in the opposite direction who asks for aid in traveling to the city that the Paladin left five days ago. At the end of day seven, the Paladin realizes the

message is for his own eyes. If he abandoned his own journey to assist the beggar, the message announces his restoration to full paladinhood. If he thought his own needs more important than the beggar's, the message informs him of his own failure, and he loses all Paladin abilities (and perhaps on the way back home he finds the beggar's body, slain by bandits or savaged by a vicious animal).

69. The Paladin must establish a shrine to his deity at the outskirts of a borderland where the human towns are often plagued by bands of roving humanoids.

70. To the Paladin's amazement, all color gradually fades from his surroundings, and his companions become insubstantial and disappear from view. He finds himself in an endless, snowy-white wilderness, stalked by a huge white wolf. If the Paladin kills the wolf, he returns to his own world, as if nothing has changed.

71. To the Paladin, the entire world seems caught up in a *time stop* spell—birds hang motionless in the sky, rivers stand frozen in place, and cities have become vast gardens of colorful statues. Only the Paladin, the equipment he carries, and a murderous double of the Paladin remain unaffected. If the Paladin kills the evil replica, time is restored, and the Paladin returns to his own place and time. If he's slain, time is restored, but to the Paladin's companions it's as if the Paladin vanished into thin air and is never seen again.

72. The Paladin must recover a revered religious icon that was stolen from his church years ago by one of the Priests responsible for its protection. The Priest, a servant of the spellcasting vampire who ordered its theft, has switched allegiance to an evil deity as a result of his thralldom.

73. The Paladin must travel to a faraway tropical island and return with a special plant whose leaves can be used in healing poultices. The island, however, is home to a primitive but dangerous race the Paladin has never before encountered (here the DM can create a humanoid race of his own devising: weregorilla savages, perhaps, or thornmen of the deep forest).

74. The Paladin is offered the opportunity to take his own life, hara-kiri fashion, to restore his honor. If he attempts to do so, his blade passes magically through his body without harm, and he is restored to full paladinhood. If he refuses, he lives the rest of his life as a simple Warrior.

75. A captured goblin is sent before the Paladin, who is told that his sins have been transferred to the bound creature before him, and that slaying the goblin will expunge his guilt. However, only by refusing to slay the helpless goblin (or perhaps by freeing and arming the goblin and then fighting him in fair combat) will the Paladin's powers be returned. Of course, a more powerful foe can be substituted for higher-level Paladins.

76. The Paladin is told by his deity (via a dream) that he must spend the next week upholding all of the Paladin's tenets (tithing, upholding Lawful Good behavior, never turning down honorable combat, etc.) without using any of his Paladin abilities (no turning undead, laying on hands, curing diseases, etc.). If he can do so successfully, his powers are restored. If he strays from the way of the Paladin during the week, he becomes a Fighter forevermore.

77. The Paladin must travel to a mountainside village several days away to lay hands on a dying girl, encountering bandits, wolves, and possibly an avalanche on the way. The girl is destined to one day be a powerful Priestess of the Paladin's faith.

78. The Paladin must sell all of his worldly possessions, give the money thus earned to his church, and spend the next month as a beggar dependent upon the kindness of others to win back his paladinhood. He must eat only that which is given to him or bought with coins given to him by strangers (not PCs!). During this time, he will presumably learn what it's like to be helpless and humble.

79. Temporarily stripped of his powers, the former Paladin must destroy an intelligent undead creature—usually a lich or vampire—before being restored to full paladinhood.

80. The Paladin must bring peace to a pair of warring orc tribes, whose ongoing battles have caused chaos in the once-peaceful forest in which they dwell.

81. The Paladin is sent to the Underdark as a hostage-negotiator to bargain for the life of an important nobleman's daughter who was captured by a band of derro. In exchange for her life, the derro want the Paladin and his companions to lead an attack against the derro's enemies (illithids, duergar, or some other Underdark race who have begun to encroach upon the derro's territory).

82. The Paladin is sent to investigate the disappearance of a courier carrying an important message to the church. The courier disappeared somewhere in a dark forest (He was captured by a green-hag, but the Paladin might have to deal with other forest dangers in his search, including ettercap snares, a giant beetle, and a wood giant hunting party.)

83. The Paladin must travel to a faraway monastery hidden in the mountains and serve the Lawful Good monks there faithfully for a month. At the end of that time, he is restored to full paladinhood. However, the monastery is often attacked by brigands, and a white dragon has had its eye on the place recently.

84. A Wizard was recently hired by the church to create magical armor for its Paladins. To atone for his transgressions, the Paladin must seek out the magical ingredients necessary for the Wizard to create the armor. There can be as many ingredients as the DM sees fit, sending the Paladin on a whole series of little quests for strange and unusual items (the feather of a couatl, the heart of a kirin, the ashes of a demilich, and so on). Of course, once the armor is finished, the Paladin gets to watch it presented to a different (and more worthy) Paladin of his own order. Coveting the armor for himself might be grounds for another quest of atonement.

85. The Paladin must free a band of slaves from a cruel taskmaster. What can make this quest an eye-opener is the fact that the slaves are a band of kobolds, and the cruel taskmaster is a human, possibly known to the Paladin—perhaps even related to him.

86. The Paladin is sent to retrieve a *rod of resurrection,* part of the treasure at a sanctuary recently overrun by a large band of evil humanoids. The *rod* must be returned to the Paladin's church immediately upon recovery.

87. The Paladin must escort a wounded soldier to his home town, many days' journey from his present location, without using any of his Paladin abilities. The normal dangers encountered on the road are more difficult because the Paladin must protect the injured soldier, who cannot move quickly due to a leg injury.

88. The church has just unearthed a *cubic gate,* and the Paladin must lead the expeditionary force to explore the areas to which the magical item is linked. Since a *cubic gate* has six sides, only one of which represents the Prime Material Plane, the DM has the option of having the Paladin explore from one to five extra-dimensional planes, depending upon the depth of the Paladin's transgression.

89. A member of the Paladin's order was believed to have been assassinated while investigating an assassins guild in a nearby city. The Paladin must pick up where the slain Paladin left off, exposing and bringing down the Guild.

90. The Paladin is sent to stop a marauding giant from terrorizing a series of small villages. The giant demands that each village send a champion to fight him in battle or he'll raze their dwellings. Each time a champion comes forth, the giant easily bests him and takes him off for his dinner. This has been going on weekly for months, and the villages finally managed to get word to the Paladin's order.

91. The Paladin is sent to stop a gynosphinx that has been waylaying travelers between two desert cities. She loves riddles, and attacks those who cannot solve them. If the Paladin doesn't wish to engage this creature in combat, she can be driven away if he challenges her to a riddle contest and wins.

92. The Paladin is sent to a distant shrine where strange complaints have been received about the Priest in charge there. It turns out that the elderly Priest is being tormented by a mischievous creature (a sprite, leprechaun, or faerie dragon) that's been slipping *philtres of love* into the Priest's meals, causing rather embarrassing results and affecting the reputation of the Paladin's order.

93. The Paladin is sent on a mission of mercy to a plague-ridden city where his healing abilities are desperately needed. With some investigation, he finds that the plague has been generated by an evil order of Priests worshipping a god of pestilence.

94. The Paladin is sent to investigate sightings of creatures from the Lower Planes in a small town. With some investigating, the Paladin discovers a permanent magical *gate* being built under the supervision of a Wizard who's made a pact with a group of tanar'ri. The Paladin must destroy the gate before construction is completed.

95. The Paladin is sent to guard a delivery of medicinal supplies to a distant hospital founded by the church. The way is fraught with danger from brigands and worse.

96. The Paladin is sent to serve at the king's castle to set a good example for the king's unruly son and (one hopes) inspire the prince into following the ways of paladinhood. While there, the Paladin may discover all sorts of political intrigue, including an attempt upon the king's life. At the end of the Paladin's "sentence," the prince could end up as one of the Paladin's henchmen, sent by the king to gain valuable "on-the-job training."

97. The Paladin is sent into a forest to meet with a group of demihumans wishing to form a Paladin-like organization. It is left up to the Paladin to help organize these beings into an order of demi-paladinhood as he sees best. It is possible that a henchman or two could come from such a quest.

98. The Paladin is sent to aid in the construction of a stronghold being built by a higher-level member of the Paladin's order. This may give the Paladin PC some ideas about the eventual construction of his own stronghold and should at least open his eyes about some of the unexpected costs, delays, and requirements that go into such an undertaking.

99. The Paladin is sent to serve as the squire for a higher-ranking Paladin for a period of time. It is hoped that the Paladin might learn from his superior's example, and this gives the DM an opportunity to have the PC encounter foes normally out of his league (since he's aiding a Paladin character much more powerful than himself). At the DM's discretion, the high-level Paladin could be generally interested in the PC's well-being, or he could have a pompous and overbearing personality, seeing the PC as little more than a servant.

100. The Paladin is sent to serve at a newly formed hospital, using his abilities to heal the sick and wounded. If the PC has a nonweapon proficiency slot open, the DM could allow him to learn the Healing proficiency as a result of his time spent there.

101. A Paladin with a nonweapon proficiency in a category useful to the Paladin order (such as Animal Training, Weaponsmithing, Armorer, or Blacksmithing) is sent to work in the order's appropriate workplace for a time.

Johnathan M. Richards was recently involved in a quest of his own—trying to find a videotape of the Goodies *(a Monty Pythonesque television show) while on a vacation to the British Isles. Alas, that particular quest met with failure.*

illustrated by Roger Raupp

Fiction by
Ben Bova

Charger

I LOOKED OUT OVER THE PARAPET OF AMESBURY FORT AND SAW THE CAMPFIRES OF THE SAXON INVADERS dotting the twilight landscape like a thousand angry red eyes. As far as the hilly horizon they stretched, more of them each night.

"They've never done this before," whispered young Arthur, standing grimly beside me. I heard bewilderment and deep foreboding in his hushed voice.

"What are they waiting for?" grumbled Sir Bors, standing on Arthur's other side. "Why don't they attack?"

"Each night their numbers grow," Arthur murmured, staring transfixed at the Saxon campfires. "Their leader, Aelle, calls himself Bretwalda now—king of Britain."

"H'mph," Bors snorted.

"The barbarians are joining his host: South Saxons, West Saxons, Jutes, Angles—they have sworn their allegiance to Aelle."

We had been hemmed inside Amesbury fort for nearly a week. Usually the barbarians raided a village or farmstead and ran away before the British defenders could find them. But now they were camped outside this hilltop fort, with more and more of the raiders joining the besiegers every day.

I looked up into the darkening sky. A fat gibbous moon grinned mockingly at me, while the Swan and the Eagle rode low off in the west. My namesake constellation of Orion was climbing above the eastern horizon. Autumn chill was in the air, yet the barbarian invaders showed no sign of heading back to their settlements on the coast and leaving Britain a season of peace and healing.

Wheezing old Merlin joined the three of us up on the parapet, climbing the creaking wooden stairs slowly, painfully. In the starlight his tattered white beard seemed to glow faintly. With his long robe he seemed to glide along the platform toward us, rather than walk.

"I have determined when the Saxons will attack," he pronounced in his quavering, thin voice.

"When?" Arthur and Bors asked as one.

"On the night of the full moon," said Merlin.

"A week from now."

Bors growled, "It makes sense. They know we're starving in here. They'll wait until they figure we're too weak to fight."

"Then we've got to do something," Arthur replied. "And soon."

"Yes," Bors agreed. "But what?"

Arthur had been put in charge of the hill fort's defense by his uncle, Ambrosius, who styled himself High King of the Celtic Britons. The Saxon barbarians had been raiding the coasts of Britain for years, decades, ever since the Roman legions had left the island. Now the Saxons and their brother tribes of barbarians were building permanent settlements in the coastal regions.

And moving inland. Amesbury was one of a string of hilltop forts that Ambrosius had hoped would stand against the Saxon tide. Some called it a castle, but it was nothing more than a wooden palisade enclosing a few huts and stables, with a single timbered tower, a rude wooden chapel, and a blacksmith's forge. Even so, it stood against the barbarians well enough. They knew nothing of siege warfare, had no knowledge of rock-throwing ballistas or any devices more complicated that a felled tree-trunk for a battering ram.

Yet crafty old Aelle had decided to bring all their strength to Amesbury and destroy the fort. And afterwards? I wondered. Would they methodically reduce each of Ambrosius' forts and leave the interior of Britain open to their ravages?

The dark night wind whispered to me, and I looked up at the stars scattered across the black sky. I had seen the same stars at ancient Ilium, I remembered, in another life. I had built a siege tower there, under the watchful eye of wily Odysseos, and led my men over the high stone wall of mighty Troy.

In another life. I am Orion, the Hunter. I have lived many lives, and died many deaths. I have travelled among those far-flung stars bedecking the night sky. I have fought battles on distant worlds under strange suns.

My creator is Aten, the Golden One: haughty, powerful, and mad with ambition. Aten has sent me to this place and time to serve Arthur, until the moment comes when I must stand aside and let him be killed. Or perhaps the Golden One plans for me to murder Arthur. I have assassinated others for him, in other lifetimes. I knew that I must obey my creator's commands, yet with every fiber of my being I wanted to defy them, to disregard his murderous orders and raise young Arthur to the power and authority that would save Briton from these barbarians.

Yet I stood helplessly in the gathering darkness beside Arthur, the son of a Roman father and Celtic mother, adopted by Ambrosius and guided by Merlin. Barely old enough to begin growing a beard, Arthur had been marked by my creator

for a brief moment of glory—and then ignominious death.

To Bors and Merlin and all the others I was Arthur's squire, a servant, a nonentity. Arthur knew better, but we kept our friendship a secret between us. It was easier for me that way: I could remain at Arthur's side and provide him with advice and guidance—and help in the fighting, when it was necessary.

"Well, what do you want to do?" Bors asked again, gruffly. He was a blunt, hard-faced man, scarred from many battles, his thick beard already showing streaks of gray.

Without taking his eyes from the hundreds of Saxon campfires dotting the night, Arthur replied softly, "Instead of waiting for the barbarians to build enough strength to bring down this fort, we should sally out and attack them."

Bors said flatly, "There's too many of 'em already. We'd be massacred."

But some of Arthur's youthful enthusiasm was returning. "If a strong group of us charged out at them on horseback, we could do them great hurt."

"We could get ourselves killed and save the Saxons the trouble of scaling the walls," Bors snapped.

"Not if we surprised them," Arthur insisted. "Not if we attacked them tonight, after the moon sets, while most of them are sleeping."

"At night?" Bors frowned at the idea.

"Yes! Why not?" Eagerly, Arthur turned to Merlin. "What do you think, Merlin? What do you foresee?"

Merlin closed his eyes for several long moments, then wheezed, "Blood and carnage. The barbarians will fly before your sword, Arthur."

"You see?" Arthur said to Bors.

Bors glowered at the mystic. "Do you see the Saxons running away and heading back to their ships?"

Merlin shook his head slowly. "No … the mists of the future cloud my vision."

Bors grumbled with disdain.

But Arthur would not be denied. Bors had more battle experience, but Arthur had the fire of youthful vigor in him.

"Orion," he commanded, "get the horses saddled and fit. And ask all the knights which of them will honor me by joining in this sally against the enemy."

As a squire, of course, I went where my master went. Knights could offer excuses to remain safely inside the fort. There were no excuses allowed for squires.

It was well past midnight by the time we were armed and mounted, thirty-two knights and squires on snorting, snuffling horses that pawed impatiently on the packed earth of the courtyard. Arthur and the other knights were helmeted and wore chain mail and carried spears as well as their swords. The moon was down. Firelight glinted off the emblems painted on their shields: Arthur's red dragon, Bors's black hawk, the green serpent of Gawain, lions and bears and other totem symbols.

I was the only squire who wore a chain mail shirt. The others, mostly beardless youths, went into battle in their tunics, protected only by their helmets and shields. I carried neither helmet nor shield nor spear, only the sword strapped to my back, as I sat on my mount at Arthur's side.

Sir Bors, still grousing, nosed his horse up to Arthur's other side. "This is madness," he muttered. "They outnumber us a hundred to one."

Arthur smiled grimly in the starlight. "Their numbers will be smaller before the sun rises again."

"As will ours," Bors mumbled.

Arthur pointed with his spear and a pair of churls lifted the timber bar from the palisade gates, then slowly swung the gates open. They creaked horribly in the stillness of the night. I thought that any chance of surprise was mostly lost already.

But Arthur bellowed, "Follow me!" and we charged out into the night, each man screaming his own battle-cry.

The barbarians were truly surprised. We thundered down into their camp at the base of the hill, trampling the embers of their camp fires and scattering the startled men like dry leaves before the wind. I stayed close behind Arthur, saw him transfix a running Saxon with his spear and lift the shrieking barbarian off his feet. Arthur was nearly knocked off his horse by the shock of the impact, and he had to let go of the spear. The barbarian warrior, clutching the shaft where it penetrated his chest, fell over backward, already dead.

I rode close behind Arthur, my sword in hand, ready to protect him against anything. My senses went into overdrive, as they always do in battle. Everything about me seemed to slow down into a languid, sluggish torpor. I saw a naked barbarian run in dreamlike slow motion at Arthur's left side, his long blond braids flying behind him. Arthur took his sword stroke on his shield and, while drawing Excalibur from its jeweled scabbard with his right hand, bashed the warrior's head with the edge of the shield. The man staggered back, and Bors pinned him to the ground with his spear.

Another warrior hurled his axe at Arthur's unprotected right side. I saw it turning lazily through the flame-lit air and reached out with my sword to flick it harmlessly away. Then I drove my mount at the barbarian and slashed him from shoulder to navel with a stroke that nearly wrenched me out of my saddle.

Waving Excalibur on high, Arthur urged his mount forward against a gaggle of barbarian warriors who stood naked but armed with swords and axes. I pulled up alongside him, and we sliced the lives out of those men, their blood spurting as they screamed their death agonies.

But still more were coming at us, roaring with anger and battle-lust. The first shock of our surprise attack had quickly worn off and now they were hot for our blood. They seemed to grow out of the very ground. No matter how many we killed still more rose against us. We waded into them as they swarmed around us, pulling men off their mounts, pulling down the horses themselves. Men and beasts alike screamed as the barbarians hacked them to bloody pieces.

The knights fared better than the lightly-armed squires, but even they were being hard-pressed by the teeming, swarming barbarians. Arthur and I weaved a sphere of death with our swords. Anyone who dared to come within reach of our blades died swiftly.

But still more of the barbarians rushed at us, swarming like hordes of wasps, surging like the tide of the sea.

"We've got to get back!" Bors shouted. "Their whole army is aroused now."

"Yes," Arthur agreed. "Sound the retreat."

The squire who served as bugler put his ram's horn to his lips and blew mightily. We turned back toward the fort, fighting and hacking our way through the maddened barbarians. The Saxons made no effort to climb the hill and get through the guarded gate; they were content to drive us out of their camp.

We were tired and dispirited as we alit from our mounts. Eleven of our number were gone, nine squires and two knights. Each of us was spattered with blood, mostly Saxon, although almost every one of us had been nicked or wounded.

Except for Arthur. He was untouched and still brimming with excitement.

"How many did we kill, do you think?" he asked.

"How many did we lose?" Bors countered.

Merlin watched us from the parapet as we dismounted wearily and helped the wounded off their horses. Several of the men groaned with pain. Many of the young squires were white-faced with shock or loss of blood.

"Well, you had your moment of glory," Bors said sourly. "It didn't do us much good, did it?"

Arthur did not argue against him. Bors was an experienced fighter. Arthur had been named commander of this fort because he was the High King's nephew, and he knew it. The Saxons and their barbarian allies were still encamped around the base of the hill. There were fewer of them, yes, but still more than enough to take the fort when they finally decided to attack.

At last Arthur said, "We'd better get some sleep. No sense standing here until dawn."

Arthur and the others headed wearily for the timbered tower at the far end of the wall. I went to the stables, where my pallet of straw awaited me amidst the steaming, sweating horses. The heat of their bodies kept the wooden shelter warm despite the breeze that whistled through its slats. I automatically tuned down my sense of smell; the stables and horse grounds were not the most fragrant areas of the fort.

I stretched out on the pallet and thought of Anya, the only one of the Creators who cared for me. I loved her, and she had taken human form in many placetimes to be with me. It was she who had handed Arthur the matchless sword Excalibur. She and I had faced the alien Set in the time of the dinosaurs. We had lived together for a brief interlude of happiness in the beautiful wooded glades of Paradise.

Always Aten pulled us apart, jealous of her love for me. Yet time and again Anya had found me, helped me, loved me no matter where and when I had been sent by the Golden One.

I closed my eyes and pictured her perfect face, those fathomless silver-gray eyes that held all of eternity, her raven-black hair cascading like a river of onyx past her alabaster shoulders. She was a warrior goddess, a proud and courageous Athena, the only one of the Creators who dared to oppose Aten openly.

Suddenly a fireball of light blasted my senses, a glare of golden radiance so bright that I flung my arms across my eyes.

"I know your thoughts, creature."

I was no longer at Amesbury fort. I had been wrenched out of that point in spacetime, translated into a vastly different place, the ageless realm of the Creators.

I could feel the brilliance of his presence. Aten, the Golden One, the self-styled god who created me.

"Get up, Orion," the Golden One commanded. "Stand before your Creator."

Like an automaton I climbed slowly to my feet, my arms still covering my eyes, shielding them from his blazing splendor. The radiance burned my flesh, seared into the marrow of my bones.

"Put your hands down, Orion, and face the glory of your master," he said, his voice sneering at me.

I did as he commanded. I had no choice. It was as if I were a mere puppet and he controlled my limbs, my entire body, even the beating of my heart.

It was like staring into the sun. The glare was overpowering, a physical force that made my knees buckle and forced my eyes to squint painfully. After what seemed like an eternity, the blinding radiance contracted, compressed itself, and took on human form. My eyes, watering with pain, beheld Aten, the Golden One who had created me.

He was glorious to look upon. Wearing splendid robes of gold and gleaming white, Aten looked every inch the god he pretended to be. To the ancient Greeks he was Apollo; to the first Egyptians he was Aten, the sun-god who gave them light and life. I first knew him as Ormazd, the fire god of Zoroaster in ancient Persia.

I loathed him. Aten or Apollo or whatever he chose to call himself, he was an egomaniac who schemed endlessly to control all of the spacetime continuum. But he is no more a god than I am. He—and the other Creators—are humans from the far future, or rather, what humans have evolved into: men and women of incredible knowledge and power, able to travel through time and space as easily as young Arthur rides a horse across a grassy meadow.

Aten created me. He built me to be his Hunter, his warrior, his assassin. He has sent me through the continuum to many times and places on missions of death and murder. I have died many times on those missions, often in horrible agony, only to be revived by Aten and sent on still another grisly task.

Now I was with Arthur in the darkness of an era where a few brave men tried to stem the tide of barbarism that was

destroying civilization all across the old Roman world.

I looked into Aten's haughty gold-flecked eyes, gleaming with vast plans for manipulating the spacetime continuum, glittering with what may have been madness.

"You hate me, Orion? Me, who created you? Who has revived you from death countless times? How ungrateful you are, creature. How unappreciative." He laughed at me.

"You can read my thoughts," I said tightly, "but you cannot control them."

"That makes no difference, worm. You will obey me, now and forever."

"Why should I?"

"You have no choice," he said.

I remembered differently. "I disobeyed you at Troy," I told him. "I refused to annihilate the Neandertals, back in the Ice Age."

His flawlessly handsome face set into a hard scowl. "Yes, and you came close to unravelling the entire fabric of space-time. It cost me much labor to rebuild the continuum, Orion."

"And you have cost me much pain."

"That is nothing compared to the agonies you will suffer if you dare to resist my commands again. Final death, Orion. Death without revival. Oblivion. But much pain first. An infinity of pain."

"I will not murder Arthur," I said.

Almost he smiled. "That may not be necessary, creature. There are plenty of Saxons available for killing him. Your task is merely to stand aside and let it happen."

"I can't," I said. "I won't."

He laughed again. "Yes, you will, Orion. When the moment comes you will do as I command. Just as you assassinated the High Khan of the Mongols."

I blinked with the memory. Ogatai. He had befriended me, made me his companion, his trusted aide—just as young Arthur had.

"You can't make me—"

But I was in the darkness and stench of the stable again, alone in the night. The Golden One had played his little game with me and sent me back to Arthur's placetime.

Alone, I lay back on the brittle straw once again. Why had Aten sent me here? What schemes was he weaving about Arthur and these barbarian invaders of Britain?

Anya. She was the only one who could help me, the only one of the Creators who openly defied Aten. She loved me, and I loved her with a passion that spanned the centuries and millennia, a love that reached out to the stars themselves.

Yet I could not find her that night, could not reach her. I called to her silently, searched out with my mind through the dark cold night. No response. Nothing but the aching emptiness of infinity, the lonely void of nothingness. It was as if she no longer existed, as if she never had existed and was merely a dream of my imagination.

No, I told myself. Anya is real. She loves me. If she doesn't answer my plea, it's because Aten is blocking my efforts, keeping us apart.

I strove with every atom of my being to translate myself to the timeless refuge of the Creators, far in the future of Arthur's world. To no avail. I strained until perspiration soaked every inch of my body, but I remained in this smelly, dank, unlit stable.

Exhausted, I fell into sleep. And dreamed of Alexander.

The crown prince of Macedonia, son of doughty Philip II, Alexander was also young and impetuous when I knew him. Proud and ambitious, driven by his cruel mother Olympias, young Alexander learned battle tactics—and the strategies of war—from his masterful father, Philip.

In my dream I was at Alexander's side once again as he led the cavalry at the epic battle of Charonea. We galloped across the field toward the Athenian foot soldiers, thrusting and slashing at their hoplites in a wild melee of dust and blood, screams of triumph and agony filling the air. I felt the horse beneath me pounding across the corpse-littered plain and strained mightily to rein him in, hold him back, as I slashed with my sword at the soldiers milling about us.

Alexander pushed ahead on old Ox-Head, his favorite steed, wading through the Athenian infantry, nearly sliding off his mount while jamming his spear into a screaming hoplite. Clutching my mount between my knees, I urged the horse on through the wildly surging tumult until I was beside Alexander, protecting his unshielded right side. Together we drove through the scattering Athenians, then began the grim task of riding down the fleeing hoplites and slaughtering them to the last man.

My eyes snapped open. It was still dark, well before dawn. Why did I dream of Alexander? Of all the lives I have led, of all the deaths that I have known, why did I dream this night of Alexander and the Macedonian cavalry?

"Find the answer, Sarmatian," whispered an invisible voice. A woman's voice. Anya!

I sat up on the pallet, ignoring the cold wind that sliced through the rickety slats of the stable, disregarding the smell and the snuffling of the drowsing horses.

Sarmatian. Anya called me a Sarmatian. I remembered that I had claimed to be a Sarmatian when I had first found myself at Amesbury, begging a skeptical Sir Bors for a place in Arthur's service.

Sarmatian.

I sat on the pallet wondering until daylight slanted through the cracks in the stable wall. I washed at the horse trough, drawing the usual laughs and jeers from the other squires and churls.

"You washed yesterday, Orion! Aren't you afraid you'll drown yourself?" laughed one of them.

"He washes every morning," called another, already at work shoveling in the manure pile. "He wants to smell pretty for the girls."

There were no women in Amesbury fort. All the women and children and old men of the region had been moved farther inland to be safe from the Saxons. If the fort fell, they would be defenseless.

"Don't you know that washing makes you weak, Orion? You're scrubbing all your strength away!"

They laughed uproariously. It was the only relief they had from the tension. We all knew that there was an army of Saxons and other invaders just outside our gate, a barbarian army that was growing with every passing day.

Ignoring their jibes I walked across the dung-dotted courtyard to the timbered tower of the fort. The guard recognized me and let me pass unchallenged. Instead of going to Arthur's quarters, however, I climbed the creaking wooden stairs to Merlin's tower-top aerie.

There was no door at the top of the stairs. The top level of the tower was a single open area, roofed over with heavy beams of rough-hewn logs. It was a misty autumn morning, dank and chill. On a clear day, I knew, from up at this height you could see almost to the waters of the Solent and the Isle of Wight.

Merlin was standing at the low wall, staring out across the fog-shrouded camp of the barbarians, his back to me. His possessions were meager: a table that held several manuscript rolls, a few unmatched chairs, a couple of chests, a few blankets for a sleeping roll. Nothing more.

"What do you want, Orion?" he asked, without turning to look at me.

"How did you know it was me?" I asked.

He shrugged his frail shoulders. "Who else could it be?"

That puzzled me. He had a reputation as a wizard, a magician who could cast spells and foresee the future. Yet, as he finally turned to face me, all I saw was a wizened old man in a stained, wrinkled robe of patched homespun with a long, dirty-white beard and thin, lank hair falling past his shoulders; both beard and hair were knotted and filthy.

"I need your help," I said.

"Yes, I know," he replied as he walked slowly, arthritically, toward his table.

"Then you know what I am about to ask."

"Naturally." He slowly sank his emaciated frame into the cushion-covered chair.

I stood before the table and folded my arms across my chest. I wore only a thin tunic, scant proof against the frosty autumn morning, but I have always been able to clamp down my peripheral blood vessels to keep my body heat from radiating away. I can also step up my metabolic rate when I have to, burning off fat stored in the body's tissues to keep me warm.

"Sit down, Orion," said Merlin. "It hurts my neck to have to crane up to see your eyes."

As I sat, I said, "Can you help me, then?"

"Naturally," he repeated.

"Well, then?"

He stared at me for a long, uncomfortable moment. Old though he may have been, there was a gleam of intelligence, of curiosity, in his gray-green eyes.

Slowly, a smile spread across his wrinkled face. "You are playing a game with me, Orion."

"And you with me, sir," I answered.

"Must I ask you what your problem is?"

"You implied that you already knew."

His smile broadened. "Ah, yes. That is part of a wizard's kit, you see. Allow the supplicant to believe that you know everything, and the supplicant will believe whatever you say."

I grinned back at him and recalled, somehow, that psychiatrists in a future civilization would use the same trick on their patients.

"So tell me truly, Orion, why do you seek my help?"

"I can't remember my past," I said. "I can't remember anything from before the first day I came to Amesbury and met Arthur."

He leaned forward, all eager attention now. "Nothing at all?"

"Only my name, and the idea that I am a Sarmatian, whatever that is."

"You don't even know what a Sarmatian is?"

"No," I said. "I haven't the faintest idea."

Merlin steepled his fingers. They were long and bony, the backs of his hands veined in blue.

"The Sarmatians were a warrior tribe from far to the east, somewhere in Asia," Merlin told me. "Many of them joined the Roman legions, where they served as cavalry. They were great horsemen, great fighters."

"Were?" I probed.

"They left when the legions departed Britain. I had assumed that you were one of them who had stayed behind, deserted the legions."

"You thought me a deserter?"

"Bors did, as soon as you told him you were a Sarmatian. That is why he was so suspicious of you at first."

Nodding with newfound understanding, I asked, "Tell me more about the Sarmatians."

Merlin leaned his head back, raised his eyes to the beamed ceiling. "They were fine metalworkers. They claimed to have invented chain mail, and something else … I can't quite recall what it was."

"Chain mail is a great advantage."

"Yes, we have our smith working night and day to produce more."

"They came from Asia, you say?"

"So I remember."

Merlin spent much of the morning asking me questions about myself, questions I could not answer. Aten always erased my memories before sending me on a new mission. He said he provided me with only enough information to perform my task. Yet on more than one mission I fought through his mental blocks and recalled things he would have preferred I did not know.

But on that chill, foggy morning I could remember nothing beyond my first moments at Amesbury fort. A young serving

boy brought up a tray of bread and a few scraps of cheese with thin, bitter beer for our breakfast. I realized that even with the fort besieged and our food supply dwindling, Merlin had better rations than the knights and squires down in the courtyard, despite his frail frame.

A horn blast ended our conversation. Arthur was calling all his men together. I got up from the chair before Merlin's table and took my leave as politely as I could.

As I got the stairs leading down, the old man called out to me. "Orion! I remember the other thing that the Sarmatians are reputed to have invented."

"And what is that?" I asked.

"Some sort of foot gear to help a man get up onto his horse. I believe they called it a stirrup."

Stirrups, I thought. Yes.

"Oh, and one thing more. A device that they fixed to the heels of their boots, to prick their mounts."

Spurs.

All that day I thought about stirrups and spurs, two simple and obvious-seeming inventions. Yet they were obvious only in hindsight, as most great inventions are.

Arthur and the other knights had neither stirrups nor spurs. When they rode into battle, they had to rein in their horses or the first shock of impact with their spears would knock them out of their saddles. Often a knight went down with his victim when he forgot to slow his mount. Even in Alexander's day, I remembered, we had to be careful to stay on our mounts as we speared footmen.

It was the same using our swords. A mounted warrior had to grip his steed tightly with his knees if he wanted to remain mounted while he slashed at the enemy with his sword.

But with stirrups a man could stay in the saddle despite a smashing impact. And with spurs he could goad his steed into a flat-out gallop. Instead of wading into the enemy so slowly that they could eventually swarm us under, we could charge into them like a thunderbolt, crash through their formation, then wheel around and charge again.

As the sun was setting I went to the blacksmith. He was a big, ham-fisted, hairy man with bulging muscles and little patience for what seemed like a hare brained idea.

"I've got all I can do to make the chain mail that my lord Arthur is demanding," he said in a loud, barking voice. Wiping sweat from his brow with a meaty forearm, he went on, "I don't have time to make some trinkets for you."

"Very well," I replied. "I'll make them for myself."

"Not until the dinner horn sounds," he said petulantly. "I've got to work this forge until then."

"I'll wait."

For the next few hours I watched the brawny blacksmith and his young apprentices forging chain mail links, heating the metal in their fire while two of the lads wearily pumped the bellows that kept the coals hot, hammering the links into shape, quenching them in a bucket of water with a steaming hiss. It was hot work, but it was simple enough for me to learn how to do it merely by watching them.

The dinner horn sounded at last and the blacksmith took his grudging leave.

"If you steal or break anything," he warned with a growl, "I'll snap your spine for you."

He was big enough to do it, if I let him.

I stripped off my tunic and, clad only in my drawers and, strapped to my thigh, the dagger that Odysseos had given me at Troy, I began forging a pair of stirrups.

They were lopsided and certainly no things of beauty, but I admired them nonetheless. Forging a pair of spurs was easier, especially since I did not want them to be so sharp that they would draw blood. They were nothing elaborate, merely slightly curved spikes of iron.

When I went to my pallet that night I was physically tired from the hard labor but emotionally eager to try my new creations in the morning. I looked forward to a good night's sleep.

But no sooner had I closed my eyes than I found myself standing on the shore of a fog-shrouded lake. The moon ducked in and out of scudding clouds. I was wearing a full robe of chain mail with a light linen tunic over it, my sword buckled at my hip.

I remembered this lake. It was where I had brought Arthur so that Anya could give him Excalibur.

I looked out across the water, silvered by the moonlight, expecting to see the fortress of stainless metal arising from the lake's depths as it had then. Nothing. The waves lapped softly against the muddy shore, a Nightingale sang its achingly sweet song somewhere back among the trees.

And then Anya's voice called low, "Orion."

Swiftly I turned and she was there standing within arm's reach, as beautiful as only a goddess can be, wearing a simple, supple robe of purest white silk that flowed to the ground. Her midnight-dark hair was bound up with coils of silver thread; links of silver adorned her throat and wrists.

We embraced and I kissed her with all the fervor of a thousand centuries of separation. For long moments neither of us said a word, we scarcely breathed, so happy to be in each other's arms again.

But at last Anya moved slightly away. Her hands still on my shoulders, she looked up into my face. Her silver-gray eyes were solemn, sorrowful.

"I can only remain a few moments, my love," she said in a near-whisper, as if afraid someone would overhear us. "I've come to warn you."

"Against Aten?"

She shook her head slightly. "Not merely him. Several of the other Creators are working with him to help the Saxons and other invaders conquer Arthur's Celts and make themselves masters of this entire island."

"But why?" I asked. "What purpose does it serve to tear down what little is left of civilization here?"

"It involves forces that reach across the entire galaxy, Orion.

This point in spacetime is a nexus, a crucial focal point in the continuum."

I recalled Aten's words to me from years earlier. "He wants to build an empire of barbarians that will reach from the steppes of Asia to these British Isles—all under his domination."

Anya hesitated a moment, then said, "It may be necessary, Orion. Aten's plan may be the only way to keep the continuum from shattering."

"I can't believe that."

She smiled, sadly. "You mean you don't want to believe it."

"It means that Arthur must be killed."

She nodded solemnly.

"No," I said. "I won't let that happen."

"You can't oppose Aten's will! He'll obliterate you!"

Anger was seething within me. "If I do what Aten wants, can we be together? Can we return to Paradise and live in peace?"

Her lovely face became tragic. "I want to, my love. But it will be impossible."

"Because he'll keep us apart," I snapped.

"Because the work of saving the continuum, the task of keeping this worldline from collapsing and destroying everything we know, requires all my strength, all my energy."

"Forever?"

"For as long as it takes," she said. "My darling, I want to be with you for all the eternities. But how can we be together if the entire universe implodes? Everything will be gone, wiped away as if it never existed."

For many long, silent moments I stared into her beautiful eyes. I saw sorrow there, a melancholy that spanned centuries of yearning.

At last I found my voice. "And to save the universe, Arthur must be killed."

"That is Aten's plan. The barbarians are uniting amongst themselves now. There is no need for Arthur in this timeline any more."

"Tell Aten to make another plan," I said. "As long as I live I will protect Arthur and help him to drive the barbarians out of Britain."

If I had thought half a second about my words, I would have expected Anya to be surprised, shocked perhaps, even angry.

Instead she smiled. "You would defy Aten, even at the risk of final death?"

I smiled back at her, grimly. "He promised me an especially painful final death."

Her smile faded. "He means to keep that promise."

"And I mean to stand by Arthur until my final breath."

"I won't be able to help you," Anya warned. "I have other tasks to do, far off among the star clouds."

I nodded, accepting that. "Tell Aten he'll have to save this timeline with Arthur in it. Let him build an empire of the Celts from this island to the farthest reaches of Asia."

"You run great risks, Orion."

"What of it? If we can't be together, what good is living to me?"

She kissed me again, lightly this time, on the lips. "Protect Arthur, then. Help him all you can. But be warned: Aten is not alone in this. Others of the Creators will be working against Arthur."

"Thanks for the good news," I said.

"Farewell, my love," said Anya. "I will return to you as soon as I possibly can."

I wanted to say several million other things to her but she vanished, simply disappeared before my eyes, like a light winking out. I love you, Anya, I called silently. I'll find you again wherever and whenever you are, no matter if I have to cross the entire universe of spacetime. I'll find you and we'll be together for eternity.

But when I awoke I was back on my pallet in the dung-smelling stable, with the results of my ironwork lying on the straw beside me.

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I washed as usual at the horse trough and took the usual jeering banter from the squires and churls. But once I sat on the bare dirt and started tying my crudely-made spurs to my ankles, they howled with laugher.

"Are you going to a cock fight, Orion?"

"Maybe he'll put on wings next and fly out of the fort!"

They rolled on the ground, laughing.

Without a word to them, I went back into the stable and took one of the horses out into the courtyard. When I began to attach my lopsided, ill-formed stirrups to its saddle, they crowded around, curious and grinning.

"What are you doing, Orion?" one of them asked.

Instead of answering, I worked my sandalled foot into one of the stirrups and hoisted myself up into the saddle, careful not to touch the spurs to the horse's flank. Not yet.

"It's like a little step!"

"Orion, can't you swing up on a horse the regular way? Are you so weak from washing every morning that you need a step to help you up?"

They roared with laughter, slapping their thighs and pounding each other's backs. Wordlessly, I nudged my mount through them and cantered around the courtyard several times. The stirrups felt a little loose. I dismounted and tightened the thongs that held them to the saddle.

By now some of the knights had come out into the courtyard to see what was making the other men laugh so hard.

"What's that you've hooked your feet into?" Gawain called to me. He was several years older than Arthur, built more slightly, his dark hair curled into ringlets that fell past his shoulders.

"It's an old Sarmatian device," I answered, walking my horse to him. Better to tell them it's an old and well-tested idea; new ideas are always suspect. Besides, it was the truth.

Two more young knights joined Gawain, each of them looking just as puzzled as he.

Charger

"Why did the Sarmatians need help getting into their saddles?" Gawain asked.

I smiled tightly. "These are not for help in getting into the saddle," I replied. "Their purpose is to keep you in the saddle."

Gawain and the others were plainly baffled. Looking up, I saw Merlin peering over the edge of his tower at me. Arthur stood beside him.

Time for a demonstration. I trotted over to the corner of the courtyard where the spears stood stacked like sheaves of wheat, leaned over and drew one from the stack. Turning my mount around, I centered my gaze upon one of the stout timbers that held the thatched roof over the blacksmith's open forge. The smith and his young apprentices were just starting up their fire, off to one side of their work area.

I spurred the horse and he took off as if a swarm of hornets were stinging him. I crouched forward in the saddle, my weight on the stirrups, levelled the spear as I galloped straight for that rough-hewn timber. Men and boys scattered out of the way as I raced forward with my spear jutting out ahead. The smith stood transfixed, staring with eyes so wide I could see white all around his pupils. His boys ran, wailing.

I rammed the spear into the timber. The spear shattered from the force of the impact, but its point buried itself in the wood almost to the haft. I wheeled my mount around and trotted back to the center of the courtyard.

"I understand now," said Gawain, with a smirk on his handsome face. "That's the Sarmatian way of breaking a perfectly good spear."

Clod! I thought. But I had to remember that I was only a squire and had to be respectful to a knight.

"Not so, sir. With these stirrups I can drive a spear through an enemy at full gallop without being knocked out of my saddle."

"And what good is that if you break the spear?" Gawain sniffed. He turned and walked away; the two younger knights went with him.

"Wait!" I called. When they turned back toward me I directed the young boys standing off by the woodpile to bring me the thickest, hardest log they could find.

It took two of the lads to carry the massive log to the center of the courtyard, their legs tottering under the load. As I directed them to stand it on end, I saw Sir Bors came up beside Gawain, a skeptical scowl on his scarred face.

I trotted my horse back to the main gate, then spurred it into an all-out charge, drawing my sword as the steed galloped madly across the packed dirt.

With one swing I split the log in half.

Gawain and the other knights seemed impressed—but only a little.

"You'd make a good woodcutter," Gawain joked as I got down from the horse.

"Don't you understand?" I said. "With the stirrups to hold you in the saddle you could charge into the enemy at full speed and hit with all the power of a thunderbolt."

"We've never used stirrups before," said Bors. "Don't see why we need 'em now."

"Because they can multiply the force of your attack!" I insisted, almost pleading with him to open his mind.

But Bors raised his thick-muscled right arm, criss-crossed with scars, and said, "This is all the force I need in battle. I've killed hundreds of Saxons, Jutes, Danes, Angles—all with this strong right arm. I don't need fancy contraptions to help keep me in my saddle."

"But—"

Gawain laughed gently. "Use your stirrups if you want to, Orion. If that's the Sarmatian way, then go right ahead. But we don't need such tricks."

I felt crushed. They didn't understand what I was offering them. I looked up toward Merlin's aerie, but neither the wizard nor Arthur were still watching me. I trotted the horse back to the stables and alit.

I handed the horse to a grinning stableboy, wondering what I could do to convince these men that stirrups would allow them to hit their enemies with the full force of a charging steed, instead of milling into battle slowly and hoping they could stay mounted by gripping the horse with their legs—while their enemies had plenty of time to fight back.

Out in the courtyard I saw Arthur standing by the blacksmith, talking. I went to him. The blacksmith shied away from me, anger and fear plain to see on his heavily bearded face.

Arthur was fingering the spear point still imbedded deep in the timber.

"I thought you were going to kill yourself," he said to me, "racing across the courtyard like that."

I made myself grin ruefully. "I'm sure the smith thought I was going to kill him."

Arthur laughed lightly. "He did look petrified, didn't he?"

"My lord, what I'm trying to show—"

"I understand, Orion," said Arthur. "Those little things on your feet allowed you to stay in the saddle even when you hit hard enough to shatter your spear."

He was no fool, this young knight.

I replied, "It could turn your knights into a powerful battle force, my lord."

"If only they would listen to reason," he said.

"You are their appointed leader. Can't you make them accept this new idea?"

He shook his head slowly. "I am their leader, true: appointed by the High King to direct the defense of this fort. But I can't force them to do anything."

"But—"

"This isn't Rome, my friend," Arthur said quietly, sadly. "These knights are free-born Celts. They don't bend to authority. They follow a leader only as long as they wish to. It's the curse of the Celts: they treasure freedom even in the face of disaster."

"Freedom is hardly a curse, my lord," I said.

"Yes, perhaps. But discipline is something that we sadly lack."

"If only one or two of them would try the stirrups," I said. "That would show the others what an advantage they are."

Arthur smiled at me, the warmth of true friendship in his eyes. "I will try them with you, friend Orion. We will sally out against the Saxons together and show them all what we can do."

***

"Absolutely not!" Bors thundered. "Your uncle would have my guts for his garters if I permitted it!"

"Then I'll go alone," Arthur said, "with no one beside me but my lowly squire." He nodded in my direction.

"You'll get yourself killed!"

We were standing in Arthur's chamber, nothing more than a small room made of rude logs at the bottom of the fort's lone tower. Its floor was packed earth, its ceiling of roughly-planed timbers a bare few inches above my head.

Arthur did not argue with the surly Bors. He merely smiled his boyish smile and said gently, "But if you came with us, then you'll probably be killed along with me and you wouldn't have to face Ambrosius."

Bors went so red in the face that the scar along his jaw stood out like a white line. He was speechless.

"You will come with me," Arthur prodded, "won't you?"

With a great fuming gasp of exasperation, Bors growled, "You're determined to do this, are you?"

"Yes," said Arthur. "I am."

"Then I have no choice, do I?"

Arthur's face lit up like a Christmas tree. "You'll come?"

Nodding sourly, Bors said, "I'll come with you."

"Fine!" Arthur exclaimed. "Now let's see how many of the others will come."

I worked all that night, going without sleep to make seven sets of stirrups and spurs. By the time the sun had climbed almost to its noontime high, Arthur gathered his knights around him in the courtyard and told them what he proposed to do.

Most of the men shook their heads warily, not trusting these Sarmatian innovations to be of any real use against the teeming hordes of barbarians outside the fort's walls.

"We sallied out against the Saxons three nights ago and it did little good," said Sir Peredur, his arm still wrapped in a blood-soaked bandage from that fight.

"But this will be different," Arthur urged. "We will strike them like avenging angels."

"I prefer to meet the barbarians from behind these stout walls," Sir Kay said, in his booming, bombastic voice. "Let them come to us."

The gathered knights nodded to one another and muttered their agreement.

Arthur turned to Gawain. "Sir knight, will you let Sir Bors and me ride into the Saxon midst alone?"

Gawain grinned like a man who knew he was being outwitted. "By God, never! Where you lead, Arthur, Gawain will follow. Right into the mouth of hell, if needs be!"

Arthur clasped his shoulder thankfully.

In the end, only five of the knights agreed to join Arthur's sally. I handed out six pairs of spurs and rigged seven horses with stirrups, plus my own, hoping we could find a seventh to join us.

One by one I led the horses out into the courtyard. One by one the knights mounted—some of them obviously with great reluctance. The seventh horse remained without a rider. I held the seventh pair of spurs in my hands, waiting.

"Is there no one here who will join us?" Arthur called out.

The knights and squires standing in the courtyard shuffled uneasily, guiltily, but none moved toward us.

Until one of the squires, a slightly-built youth, pushed through the crowd and said, "I will go with you, sir, if you will have me."

Arthur smiled down at him. At first I thought Arthur would turn the lad away because he was so young, but then I realized that Arthur himself was barely more than a stripling.

Turning to Sir Kay, who still stood stubbornly off to one side, Arthur commanded, "Kay, find this squire chain mail, shield and helmet." Then he leaned toward me and said, "Give him the last set of spurs."

In a few minutes the lad was mounted on the seventh horse, armed with coat of mail, a helmet that wobbled on his narrow shoulders, a dented, patched shield, a sword that seemed too big for his delicate hands, and a long spear.

I could no longer see Arthur's face, hidden by his helmet, but his voice rang out clearly: "Follow me, men, and we will drive the invaders back to the sea!"

The fort's gates creaked open, and the seven of us pricked our mounts into a thundering charge. For a brief instant I wondered what the Golden One was thinking. Was I playing into his hands and sending Arthur out to his death?

Not while I breathe, I swore to myself. I'll die before I'll let Arthur be killed.

As always in battle, the world around me seemed to slow down into a lethargic dreamy languor. My senses raced into overdrive, adrenaline flooding my arteries, everything around me seen in microscopically crisp detail.

The barbarian host had hurriedly formed a battle line as soon as they heard the fort's gates begin to creak. They were standing waiting for us as we charged down the hill, hard muscled men bare to the waist gripping their swords and axes, long blond braids running down their powerful chests, half a dozen lines of them arrayed to absorb our charge and then engulf us.

I saw spittle form and drip in slow motion from the foaming mouth of Arthur's mount, at my left side. He was crouched forward in his saddle, spear levelled, weight on his stirrups. I picked out one of the Saxon warriors and aimed my spear at his chest.

The barbarian tactic for dealing with a cavalry charge was to absorb the impact with as many men as possible and then, once the horsemen had slowed down, to bring in more men from the flanks to swarm the riders under.

But this time we didn't slow down. Arthur was the first to strike, snapping a Saxon's head off his shoulders with the power of his thundering charger behind the point of his spear. I hit my man in the chest, wrenched the spear free, and charged into the next rank. I could hear our seven men roaring as they drove through the barbarian battle line like a hot knife through butter, and the death screams of the invaders as those long spears smashed the life out of them.

We smashed through their battle line, wheeled, and charged into them again. This time they broke and scattered before us, wailing with sudden fear.

"Stay together!" Arthur bellowed, and we rode as one terrifying fist of death with seven long spears that smashed flesh and bone wherever they struck.

The barbarians were scurrying away from us like rats, running in every direction, desperately trying to avoid our bloody spear points. But no matter how fast they ran, our steeds were faster. Spears broke, and knights pulled out their shining swords with the hiss of metal on metal. Those blades licked out the lives of every man they reached.

I was spattered with enemy blood up to my thighs; my sword was red and dripping.

"Look!" I called to Arthur. "Up on the ridge."

A small band of mounted warriors stood on the crest of the ridge, wearing helmets that bore horns and shone with gold and jewels.

"Aelle!" shouted Arthur. "He who styles himself king of Britain."

He spurred his mount up the slope toward the Saxon leader and his band of picked guards. I charged up after him, leaving Gawain and Bors and the others to complete the route of the terrified invaders.

I wondered how wise it was for Arthur to charge against nearly a dozen mounted warriors, but he was swinging Excalibur over his head, yelling wildly and spurring his steed up the slope. I charged after him.

For several eternally long moments we raced up toward the crest of the ridge. I could see, in slow motion, the troubled looks Aelle's men were giving each other. Their horses shifted and stamped, as if sensing the riders' unease. They all looked toward Aelle. The old man whom they had elected Bretwalda sat on his mount, wide-eyed with shock and sudden terror, stunned at what had happened to his warrior horde.

I expected them to charge downhill at us, eleven against two. Instead, Aelle abruptly yanked at his reins and turned from us. He and his men disappeared behind the ridge's crest.

By the time Arthur and I reached the crest they were already halfway across the glade below, galloping for their lives.

Arthur reined in his mount. "No sense chasing after them, Orion," he said firmly. "Our mounts are tired, theirs fresh."

I turned back toward the plain before Amesbury fort. The invading barbarian army was gone, run away, scattered to the four winds. Arthur's knights were trotting their spent horses slowly up toward us.

"You've won a great victory, my lord," I said.

Arthur pulled the heavy helmet off his head and shook his thick sandy hair free.

"Thanks to you," he answered, smiling broadly, "and your Sarmatian tricks."

"It was your courage and leadership that won the battle, my lord. Without those qualities, my 'tricks' would have been mere scraps of iron."

Gawain was grinning widely as we walked our mounts back to the fort. "They won't be back," he predicted. "Not for a long time."

Arthur was also in a boyishly jovial mood. "Did you see old Aelle run away! One glimpse of Excalibur and he turned tail!"

Even Bors was pleased. "My lord," he said to Arthur, "you should note the bravery of this youngster." He pointed to the squire who had volunteered to join us. "He fought like St. Michael the Archangel himself."

The lad drooped his chin timidly, hardly daring to look at Arthur.

"Don't be shy, youngster," said Arthur. "Praise from Sir Bors is as rare as snow in July."

Everyone laughed, except the youngster.

Once inside the fort, the knights began to hand their shields and weapons to their squires while the knights who had remained behind watched in envious, shame-faced silence.

The youngster walked through the men to Arthur, and held out the spurs he had worn.

"Here, my lord. Thank you for allowing me to wear them."'

"Keep them," Arthur said. "You went into battle a lowly squire, but your courage and skill demands better for you. Kneel."

Dumbfounded, the boy dropped to one knee.

Arthur drew out Excalibur, still caked with barbarian blood. Then he hesitated.

"I don't know your name," he said.

"Lancelot, my lord."

Arthur smiled and tapped him on each shoulder with the blade, leaving two dark red smudges.

"Rise, Sir Lancelot. Welcome to the company of knighthood."

Lancelot's mouth hung open. He swallowed visibly before he could utter, "Bless you, my lord."

The other knights crowded around to congratulate the lad. But I thought I heard, in the far-off echoes of my mind, the Golden One laughing mockingly and saying, "The seed of destruction has been sown, Orion. Arthur's days are numbered."

Dr. Ben Bova was a champion fencer (novice class) in New England, worked on the Vanguard satellite program two years before NASA was created, and learned to fly a plane … and even land it! Orion is his way of examining the past; the character has been to Troy and made love to Helen, seen the extinction of the dinosaurs, and prevented the eradication of the Neandertals. Now Orion's helping Arthur, making him almost as busy as Ben himself has been.

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A983

THE DRAGON QUEEN
Valamaradace

The Wyrm Regent of the North is a benign monarch, but only a fool would test her powers.

by
Ed Greenwood

illustrated by
Storn Cook

VALAMARADACE IS A LIVING LEGEND OF THE NORTH. The Dragon Queen of Silverymoon is seldom seen (in her own shape, at least) by humans, but many have felt the warmth and aid of her power and decrees. With her consort Deszeldaryndun Silverwing, the Guardian Worm of Everlund (an adult male silver dragon covered in an earlier "Wyrms of the North"), Valamaradace reigns over a domain as absolutely as any human ruler. Thankfully for the future of civilization in the North, she's chosen to further Alustriel of Silverymoon's dream of Luruar by allowing that realm to take in her own domain.

That's not to say the Dragon Queen has renounced her self-appointed duties of guardianship over her domain or become a lackey of Luruar. Instead, Valamaradace has dedicated herself not only to maintaining her personal standards over conditions in her domain, but also to continually testing the fledgling realm of Luruar, ferreting out deceit and treachery among its rulers and agents. For such work, the venerable female gold dragon takes on many guises. Her favored form when making one of her rare forays into cities is that of Targarda, an agile, diminutive female human possessed of "elfin" looks and a little magic; only the Chosen of Mystra and a few Harpers know that this beautiful mageling is in truth the Dragon Queen.

When in disguise, Valamaradace considers herself "on holiday" so far as surface inclinations and manners are concerned. Though she clings always to her goals and views of how the world should be, she'll act out a chosen role to the hilt, straying far from her true nature in words and apparent actions if need be. When appearing as herself, however, she reverts to her own gentle, soft-spoken ways. The Dragon Queen quietly and calmly thwarts violence, stops cruelty, and rebukes pride and arrogance whenever she encounters it. Often she's forced to remind "good" beings that they cheapen themselves when they adopt the fierceness, bad graces, and attitudes of the creatures they struggle against.

Valamaradace did not confer a title on herself; rather, it was given to her sometime around 826 DR by the dying Dragon Queen Mairogra, a red dragon who'd ruled a domain centered roughly on Everlund but hunted vigorously

elsewhere. Mairogra was laid low in the end by the concerted attacks of many adventurers. Valamaradace came upon the mortally wounded Queen and cast the only spell she had that could help Mairogra: a *painquench* magic that made the red dragon's last hours easier. Many sages suspect she agreed to act as a monarch because nurturing an area of countryside to be "the way she wanted it" is the task she most wanted to do, and the way she wanted to spend her life.

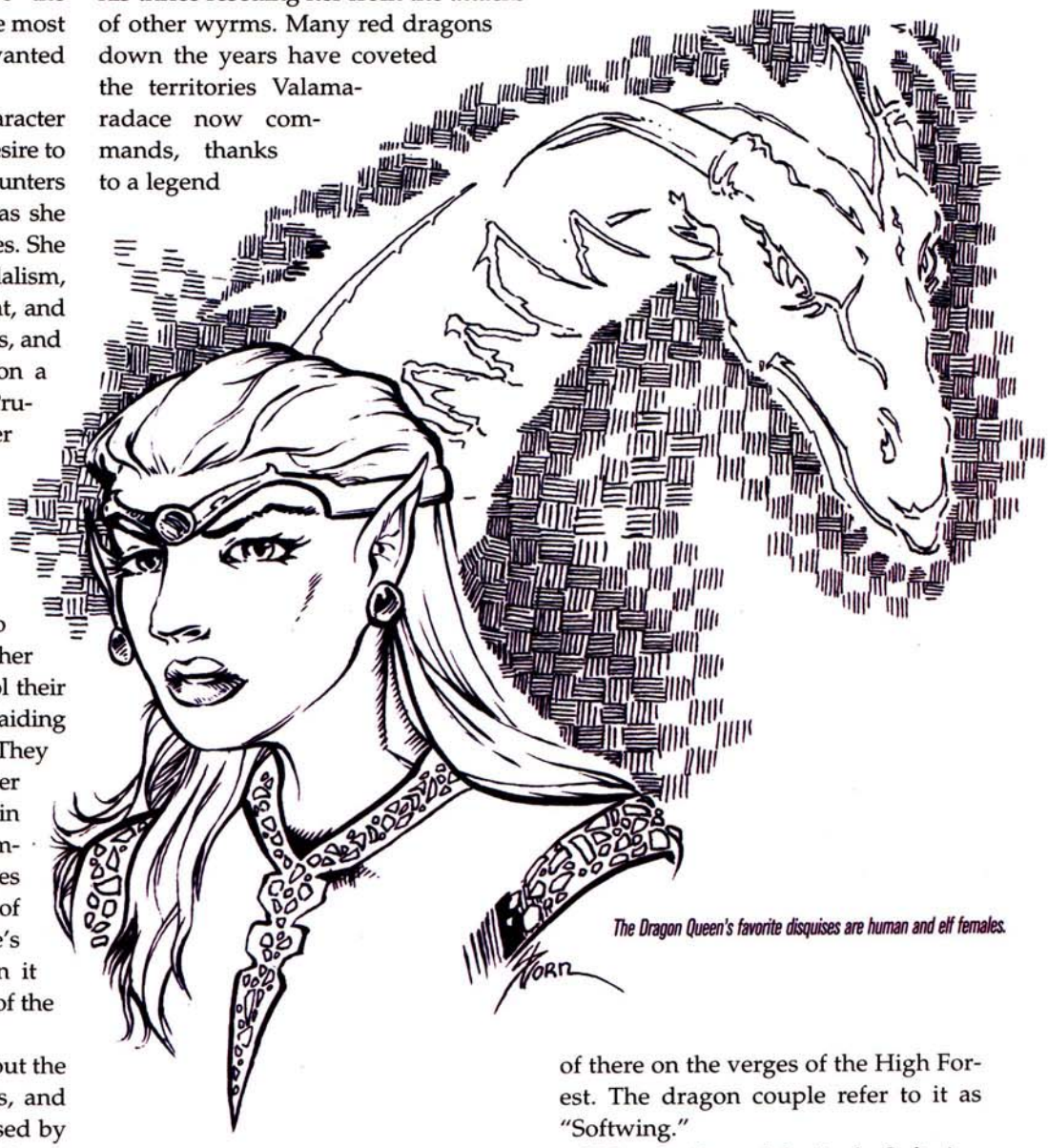
The keys to Valamaradace's character are her kindness, empathy, and desire to understand the beings she encounters and cater to their needs as long as she doesn't harm other living creatures. She finds the concepts of traps, vandalism, and wanton destruction abhorrent, and she is a foe of arsonists, orc hordes, and others who visit destruction upon a whim or for their own pleasure. Prudence for the maintenance of her own reputation (and therefore, that of her teeitories) leads her to engage in snooping or fighting in disguise, rather than openly as the Dragon Queen. She and her consort are working to give the impression that many other dragons besides themselves patrol their domain, attacking predators and aiding others in Valamaradace's name. They often do this by assuming other forms, and the Dragon Queen in particular has become an accomplished mimic. Valamaradace loves acting, and her subtle sense of humor comes through when she's "being someone else" more than it does when she's playing the role of the gently regal Dragon Queen.

Valamaradace knows more about the doings of humans, demihumans, and other civilized creatures (dismissed by many wyrms as no more than loud, swarming "small prey") than almost all other dragons. Her desire to understand other beings leads her to converse with them and really listen to what they say, remembering almost all of it without the distortion wrought by the egos of most dragons.

Her relationships with other wyrms have been, in the words of the human sage Velsaert of Baldur's Gate (fast becoming recognized as an authority on the history of dragons up and down the Sword Coast), "a series of avoidances while in dragon form, and careful observance from disguise. Trust comes slowly to the Dragon Queen—the sole exception is Deszeldaryndun Silverwing, now her consort. He won her heart after a courtship that followed on his thrice rescuing her from the attacks of other wyrms. Many red dragons down the years have coveted the territories Valamaradace now commands, thanks to a legend widespread among dragons that claims Mairogra had amassed a half-mile-deep pit entirely filled with gems." If there ever was any such pit, it's been covered over with a deep layer of earth and never sought out by the Dragon Queen, and most sources (including both Volo and Elminster) agree it probably never existed ... but its lure remains strong.

Valamaradace's Lair

The Dragon Queen and her consort Deszeldaryndun dwell in the Floating Mountain. This gigantic, hollow, oval rock is kept aloft by the Dragon Queen's magic, which also enshrouds it in mists, and directs it wherever she desires. Usually it hovers low over the woods due west of Everlund, or south of there on the verges of the High Forest. The dragon couple refer to it as "Softwing."



The Dragon Queen's favorite disguises are human and elf females.

Valamaradace inherited Softwing from her predecessor Mairogra, who left it in a resting bed of deep sand (a natural sandpit) southwest of Everlund when she didn't have it aloft. Old Northern legends of wandering children "kidnapped by a dragon who moved its lair with them inside" are believed to have stemmed from human encounters with the Floating Mountain.

Today, the Floating Mountain looks like a large, mottled-gray potato riddled with gaping holes. Inside are a series of tunnels and chambers with silky-smooth walls. Spells concealing "cupboard" holes are set high in the caverns, where some treasure—including magical items—is kept. (In particular, the Dragon Queen seems to delight in collecting two sorts of trophies from foes who battle her: magical armor and any enchanted items carried by Wizards.) Other spells are known to warn the draconic couple from afar if intruders have entered the lair and to awaken the equivalent of long-range *wizard eye* spells that can transmit what they see to Valamaradace no matter how distant from her lair she might be.

The Dragon Queen keeps no servitor creatures at her lair and rarely invites anyone into it, but enemies seeking to sneak in and steal have sometimes met Harpers and others waiting to meet Valamaradace. These guests vigorously defended the Floating Mountain against intrusion.

Valamaradace's Domain

The Dragon Queen determines the borders of her domain. In recent years its boundaries have changed little. They take in the entire Moonwood to the north, running southeast to Sundabar and back southwest along the River Rauvin to Turlangtor (westernmost of the rocky heights that run south of the river and east to Turnstone Pass). From there her domain extends southwest through the Woods of Turlang to the Lost Peaks, then west along the Dessarin to a point south of Flint Rock. At this point, her border turns to run due north across the Evermoors to the River Surbrin, then along its banks back to the northern tip of the Moonwood again.

Within this area, Valamaradace tries to change the bounty of the land and activities of inhabitants and visitors to her will; she and her consort patrol often and watch diligently over unfolding events—and all intrusions. She knows that her work has made this area even more attractive to predators (orc hordes, for instance), and she is always warily looking for the approach of raiding forces.

The Deeds of Valamaradace

The Dragon Queen gathers, grows, and markets (in Everlund and Silverymoon) many sorts of food-crops, herbs, and their seeds in her domain. She maintains several "root cellar" storage caverns (their temperature modified by *control weather* spells) in the wilds west of Everlund. A resident colony of sprites guards them against depredations by rodents and more intelligent foragers.

Valamaradace treats her entire domain as a gigantic garden, patrolling its borders and planning how best to tend its growing things. Her consort Deszeldaryndun deals with most intruders and "civilized" beings within the territory, while Valamaradace sees to removing diseased trees and plants, planting new ones, balancing light and shade, marsh and dry land, altering drainage, and so on to create as lush and stable a land of plenty as she can. She's constantly busy "adjusting the balance" of living things and refining her spells to give her greater control over the domain.

Neutral-aligned beings are tolerated as travelers in her territory, but not as settlers; evil beings are destroyed or driven out when detected (which has led some Harpers and other Good-aligned beings to dub the domain "the Haven"). Good creatures discover that though temples and abbeys are few and far between, many hermit-priests and other healers dwell in the Dragon Queen's domain, and that it's largely free of strife. Wounded and sick beings often tarry in the Haven to recover.

Valamaradace uses her skills and gifts for the benefit of all so that none might go hungry or needy in the Haven. Beings who misuse her bounty, however, to laze away their days in her domain expecting free food and handouts are visited by superiors, creditors, or their agents (sent by the Dragon Queen), to be "set back to productive tasks."

Valamaradace's Magic

The Dragon Queen wields an impressive roster of spells, but they pale beside the most powerful item at her disposal.

The Crown of the Mountain

This ancient artifact appears as a crown or spike-studded circlet of rough, unadorned stone that can't be shattered by any known means. It alters to fit the brows (or wrist, or tail) of its wearer and seems immune to most spell effects (and all Divinations, Enchantments, and destructive magics thus far applied to it).

The true origin of the Crown is in dispute. Some say it was a gift of the dwarven gods to their people, others that it was yet another overpowerful tool devised by a Netherese sorcerer-king—and there are even some who hold to the view that it was brought to Toril from some other world, suffering

the loss of its primary purpose and some of its greatest powers in the process.

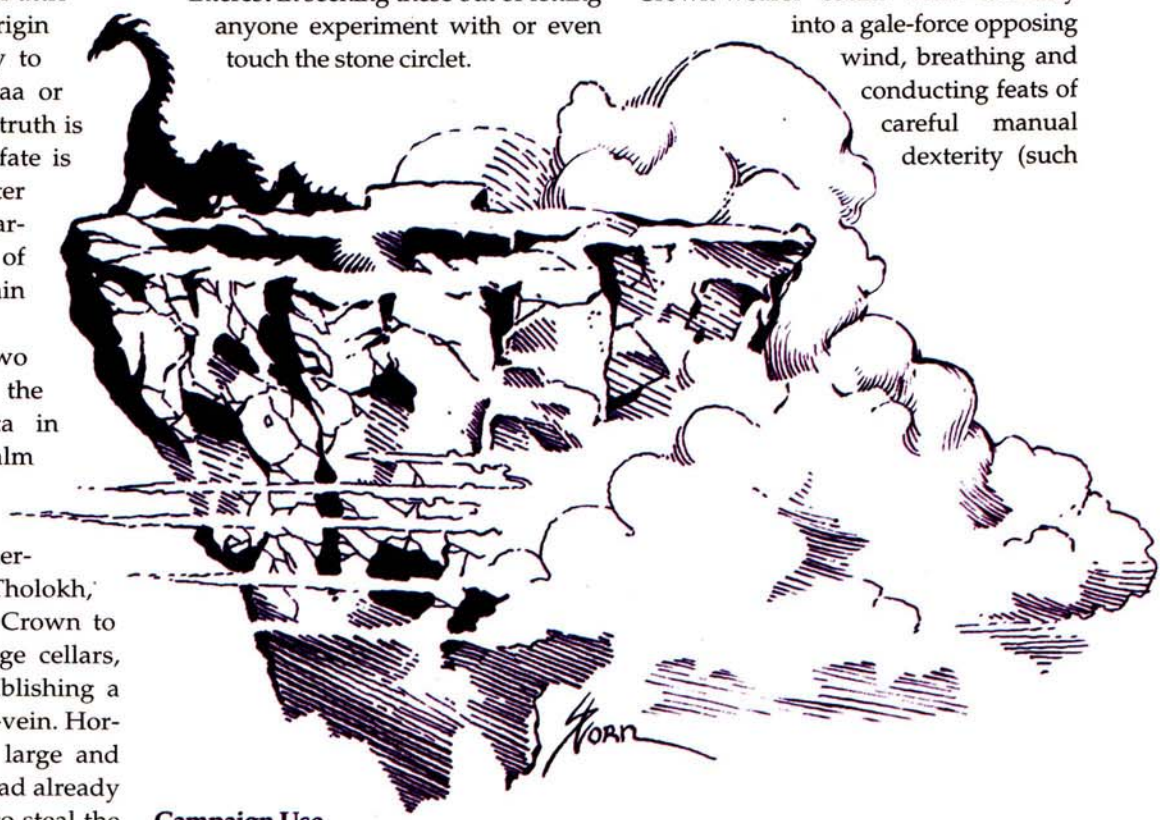
History

The first reliable record of the Crown (as opposed to the disputed, fanciful tales of it being bestowed upon mortals by various gods, or worn by a Netherese archwizard as he went down fighting a titanic spell-battle against over forty hostile mages) occurs in three separate adventurers' diaries, all of which mention a hitherto-unknown Wizard by the name of Larbrand "from southern lands" who used the Crown in a quarry in the Tashalar circa 336 DR. The writers hailed from different cities around the Shining Sea; their attribution of a more southerly origin for Larbrand has led many to think he came from Halruaa or perhaps even Zakhara. The truth is now lost; even Larbrand's fate is unknown, beyond his later encounter with the sage Hoarmandar, whose description of the Crown is Elminster's main source.

What is certain is that two dwarven scouts exploring the Underdark near Chessenta in 523 DR (they reported "a realm of spiders" and similar unpleasantnesses thereabouts) met with a human merchant, one Urabbastrar Tholokh, who was busily using the Crown to carve out ever-larger storage cellars, with plans of perhaps establishing a mine if he could find an ore-vein. Horrified at the thoughtlessly large and unstable cuttings Tholokh had already made, the dwarves agreed to steal the Crown away from him—even if they had to slay him on the spot to get it. A few breaths later, Tholokh broke through into an existing cavern and was swarmed over by carrion crawlers so numerous and so energetic that the dwarves were forced to flee. When they dared return, days later, the dwarves found no sign of whence the human had gone.

The Crown surfaced once more, this time in 811 DR, ere it came into the possession of the Dragon Queen Mairogra. A priest of Talos was using it to hollow out a pinnacle-shaped island in the Nelanther to create a large temple-citadel. Unfortunately, he either stumbled upon or attracted the attention of someone or something magically powerful, and one night lightning rained "down into the sea like white, crackling fingers" from the sky. In the morning, the temple was no longer a pinnacle of rock, but only a few drowned fingers jutting out of the rolling waves ... and the Crown was hidden again.

How the first Dragon Queen acquired it remains a mystery, as are its original purpose and possible additional, related powers—and Valamaradace shows no interest in seeking these out or letting anyone experiment with or even touch the stone circlet.



Campaign Use

The Crown does possess other powers not revealed here; Valamaradace is aware of some, but not how to access or control them—and will never be able to do so, as certain of these powers can only be awakened by wearing the Crown in the right location (ruins outside the Dragon Queen's domain) and undertaking the proper processes. It's rumored among sages who study such things that Candlekeep and even some far humbler libraries might hold hints of the procedure. It's also rumored that the Crown can control other items besides the Floating Mountain, including certain "floating" ruins or downed flying ships, castles, or even cities. At least one lorebook warns that using the Crown for such purposes forever changes the mind of the user or brings him under the fell influence of some ancient, malignant sentience.

Powers

Constant: Any being(s) wearing, holding, or directly touching the Crown of the Mountain can withstand (ignoring all damage and effects) all natural and magical forces that normally do harm due to extremes of temperature, precipitation, and wind. For instance, a Crown-wearer could walk normally into a gale-force opposing wind, breathing and conducting feats of careful manual dexterity (such as writing a note) where others would be swept away or reduced to clinging helplessly to a rock or other immovable object.

The Crown also protects its wearer from being buried, struck, or injured in any way by the impact or weight of stone missiles (even enchanted ones), avalanches, rockslides, and deliberately-telekinesed or dropped rocks, including sand, mud, and gravel. It surrounds the wearer with an aura of protection that is only about 2 inches deep

but turns aside even stone spears, fired stone-headed ballista bolts, shards of rock from explosions only feet away from the Crown-wearer, and even collisions between the wearer's falling, flying, or hurled body and jagged stone spars. This can allow a Crown-wearer to deliberately leap off a cliff and land without taking any falling damage—so long as that landing is on rocks. The magic of this item allows even a bound and blindfolded wearer to land without harm on rocks upright and on "safe" footing ... even if that footing is a tiny ledge on the face of a cliff, or a pinnacle with empty space on all sides. If such a perch collapses into an avalanche, the magic of the Crown keeps its wearer "riding" the avalanche without being buried and can bring him or her to any number of other "safe standings" during the slide, if circumstances (not the deliberate will of the wearer) call upon it to do so.

Invoked: When worn or held and invoked, the Crown allows its wearer to cast many Wizard and Priest spells as noted hereafter, all at the 22nd level of magic use. Awakening any invoked power cancels any "limited" invoked power that is in operation but has no effect on "unlimited" invoked powers.

The limited powers are as follows: *control weather* (once/day); *dig* (twice/day); *disintegrate* (once/day); *great teleport* (six times/day): this 8th-level variant of the familiar *teleport* spell moves up to 2 tons of material at a time, which can include up to two living beings and/or any amount of nonliving objects that are touching each other directly (such as a pile of gear or stones); *invisibility* (once/day); *mass telekinesis* (thrice/day): this 8th-level variant of *telekinesis* has a range of 40 yards/level and a weight limit of 300 lbs. (a successful saving throw by the target still negates it). Like *mass levitate* (see below), the correct magical process allows multiple *mass telekinesis* spells to be combined on a single object; *stone shape* (six times/day); *stone tell* (twice/day).

The unlimited powers (usable as often as desired) are *abeyance, focal stone,* and *mass levitate.* The first two spells are detailed in *Volo's Guide To All Things Magical;* the third spell is a 5th-level variant of the familiar *levitate* spell, with a weight limit of 2 tons. Through use of *abeyance* and *focal stone,* multiple *mass levitate* spells can be cast "in abeyance" on a focus. This enables the wearer to affect a lone object of titanic weight. The Dragon Queen uses such a combination to keep the Floating Mountain aloft.

Curse: Any creature of less than 8 Hit Dice or levels who attempts to invoke a power of the Crown (as opposed to merely benefiting from its "constant" properties) is affected as if by an *imprisonment* spell for 1d6 years. (The Crown falls to the ground, and the user vanishes into the earth, trapped until a *freedom* spell is properly cast on the spot or the curse expires, whereupon the earth returns the being to where the user was standing when the curse took effect.)

Any being who invokes the *control weather, disintegrate, mass levitate,* or *mass telekinesis* powers of the Crown must immediately make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation or be rendered immobile for 2d20 hours. The being's intellect and senses remain unaffected, and both the power invoked and other Crown powers remain under the being's control, insofar as the being can function while immobile and unable to speak. The first time a Crown-wearer calls on any of these powers, the save is made at a –3 penalty; the second time, at –2; the third time at –1; the fourth time at par; the fifth at +1; and so on until +4 is reached. Forever after, all such Crown saving throws are at +4 for that individual. An exception to this progression occurs whenever a saving throw fails. If a being survives paralyzation and calls on such Crown powers again (no matter how much time has elapsed between the failed save and this next attempt), the second saving throw is made at the same modifier as the failed one. This occurs at each failure; a creature repeatedly failing a saving throw at a –1 penalty would make all such saves at –1 until a success occurred. Removal of the Crown from a paralyzed being doesn't end the paralyzation, and neither does any attack affecting a paralyzed Crown-wearer, but attacking that being after the Crown has been removed ends the paralysis instantly.

Suggested Means of Destruction

◆ The Crown of the Mountain melts away harmlessly if cast into a flow of molten volcanic rock and then targeted by six *disintegrate* spells simultaneously.

◆ The Crown can be crushed by the blow of any enchanted hammer or tool if struck while on an altar dedicated to Grumbar or any dwarven or gnome deity. A furious release of wild magics accompanies such a passing.

◆ The Crown can be destroyed by enclosing it together with no less than six earth elementals inside a sphere of magical force (several spells afford usable barriers; only trial and error can determine which dweomers are insufficient), then causing the sphere to dwindle to a fist-sized or smaller extent. This results in an explosion in which the elementals perish, wild magics are hurled forth in all directions, and the ground and immediate surroundings are shattered, pulverized, or hurled away.

Valamaradace's Fate

The Dragon Queen is too tempting a target to avoid attacks from evil Faerûnians who are truly mighty in sorcery. Elminster foresees a grim future for her but pledges that he and the Seven will do what they can to see that "her shining presence remains as long as possible."

Ed Greenwood might well have created the FORGOTTEN REALMS® *setting in his formative years, but he'd like to visit Krynn once, just for an afternoon. Riding a dragon, lance under arm while the wyrm loops and dodges between rocky pinnacles, chasing after rival riders, looks like* fun! *Elminster, who's tried it, said merely, "Fun, eh? I'd not be quite so swift and sure in the use of the word. Gut-unsettling is nearer the mark."*

PC Portraits

Knights

by Roger Raupp

So Larry says something like, "only faces, no backgrounds ... whatever you want." To me, that was like saying, "pick the icing off the cake, child." The face is such a fun and engrossing thing to draw. It's there that a character can be given the illusion of life. That's my kind of magic.

The T'sa

These quick-learning reptiles make a curious addition to your AD&D® campaign.

by David Eckelberry

illustrated by Jim Crabtree

THE T'SA ARE A FALLEN PEOPLE. Once possessed of technology far beyond that of humankind, the t'sa now find themselves living in a world of medieval magic—one not of their choice or creation. Since t'sa generations pass quickly, it's no surprise that these reptilian humanoids have lost much of what they once knew. Now they have only a few stray relics to remind them of their former glories. However, the high-spirited t'sa are quickly adapting to their new world, learning all that it has to teach—including magic.

Ability Score Adjustments: Initial t'sa ability scores are modified by a +2 bonus to Dexterity, a +1 to Intelligence, and a –2 penalty to Strength and Constitution.

Thieving Skill Racial Adjustments: Pick Pockets: +10%; Open Locks +15%; Find/Remove Traps +10%; Move Silently –10%; Hide in Shadows –5%; Detect Noise —; Climb Walls –5%; Read Languages —.

Class Mixing: A t'sa PC may become a Fighter/Thief, Fighter/Cleric, Fighter/Wizard, Wizard/Thief, Cleric/Thief, or Ranger/Cleric. Single-classed t'sa with extremely high ability scores in their prime requisites may gain additional levels above given racial maximums, as per Table 8 in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*.

T'sa PCs generally cannot be Specialist Wizards or Specialty Priests. They're new to both magic and an understanding of the gods. In addition, the t'sa tend to be generalists, trying to learn a little about everything rather than devoting themselves to a single subject.

Suggested Kits: T'sa PCs can begin in any environment, urban or wilderness. The t'sa tendency to wander means that they can be found practically anywhere, and their inquisitiveness drives them to encounter new regions and new peoples. As a people, the t'sa have learned much of the knowledge common to their setting, and their selection of kits and proficiencies should reflect this experience.

Fighter—Peasant Hero, Swashbuckler, Wilderness Warrior (PHBR1).

Ranger—Explorer, Pathfinder (PHBR11).

Mage—Academician (PHBR4)

Priest—Peasant, Scholar (PHBR3).

Thief—Acrobat, Investigator, Scout, Swindler, Spy, Swashbuckler (PHBR2).

Bard—Charlatan, Gypsy-Bard, Jongleur, Riddlemaster (PHBR7).

Skills & Powers *Kits*—Acrobat,

Explorer, Merchant, Peasant Hero, Scholar, Scout, Spy, Swashbuckler, Weapon Master.

Hit Dice: T'sa PCs receive Hit Dice by class; because of their limited Constitution, it's impossible for t'sa to gain additional hit points as a result of exceptional Constitution scores.

Typical Alignments: Most t'sa tend toward Chaotic alignments, but t'sa PCs can select any alignment.

Natural Armor Class: 4. T'sa possess natural body armor that covers almost all of their bodies. Combined with a high Dexterity, this makes the t'sa quite difficult to hit in combat.

Age Categories: Starting Age = 7 + 1d6 years; Maximum Age Range: 33 + 1d6 years; Average Maximum Age: 37 years; Middle Age = 18 years; Old Age = 25 years; Venerable = 33 years.

Average Height and Weight: 49 + 2d6 inches; 75 + 2d10 lbs.

Movement Base: 12.

Appearance: T'sa are similar in size to most humanoids, but they look like small, fast-moving lizard men covered in red, brown, gold, or green scales. In addition to their utility in attracting mates, the resplendent scales are extremely hard and dense, yet remarkably light. Essentially, the scales provide protection equivalent to banded mail armor.

Male and female t'sa can be distinguished by the ridges and plates that rise over their heads and backs. While these plates appear in a variety of shapes, the male's are generally larger and more likely to branch out. Some sages theorize that t'sa male ancestors may have used these plates as sharp weapons, charging forward with heads lowered. Today, though, the spinal crests are vestigial, having atrophied into ornamentation.

Their forelimbs, each equipped with an opposable digit, double as arms and front legs; the t'sa sometimes behave as bipeds but use quadrupedal movement to assist in climbing and running over rugged terrain.

Habitat: T'sa have no special environmental aversion or vulnerability. They can live in any climate but have a preference for warm, wet regions such as swamps, marshes, or lake shores. The oldest t'sa legends catalog all of the virtues of living near a source of fresh water, a source of food, and easy transportation. In biological terms, warm mud or sand might have helped more primitive t'sa build nests and care for eggs. More rare, but still possible, are t'sa settlements on a continental coast. The t'sa have no great gift for sailing but can learn the skills as well as anyone.

Likely places for the t'sa to find a home include lands near the Marsh of Telimber (or any of the great marshes near the Sword Coast) in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, the warm Gnat Marshes along the Nessee River in the GREYHAWK® setting, or the realms of Kal Kalathor or Osoerder in the BIRTHRIGHT® setting.

Society & Religion: T'sa society is centered around the existence of broods. Every three to five years, a t'sa enters a reproductive phase for a week and seeks out a similarly interested t'sa of the opposite sex. Only a month after a successful mating, a t'sa female lays 5d4 eggs. After these clutchmates hatch a few weeks later, they never demonstrate a strong attachment to their mother; instead, they bond with one another as a brood. Within a few months, the hatchlings have grown to adult size and can care for themselves. The mother leaves them to fend for themselves.

Since reproduction is such a capricious affair, the t'sa never develop a sense of family toward those outside their siblings, focusing their loyalty on brothers and sisters. Within t'sa society, an individual's stature depends on the behavior of the entire brood. The broodlings relate to one another through a sense of achievement and social standing. Initially, a brood's social status is determined by its birth mother. Yet each brood tends to quickly distinguish itself, for good or ill. A single remarkable or villainous clutchmate can lift the entire brood to a high standing or plunge the brood into ignominy.

To determine the relative importance of a PC t'sa brood, simply roll 1d20. A low roll indicates that the brood has a long social ladder to climb before gaining, or regaining, the respect of the society. A high roll means the brood has the admiration of their peers and the advantages of high birth.

T'sa

Starting Ability Score Range

Ability	Min	Max
Strength	3	15
Dexterity	10	20
Constitution	3	14
Intelligence	9	18
Wisdom	3	16
Charisma	3	17

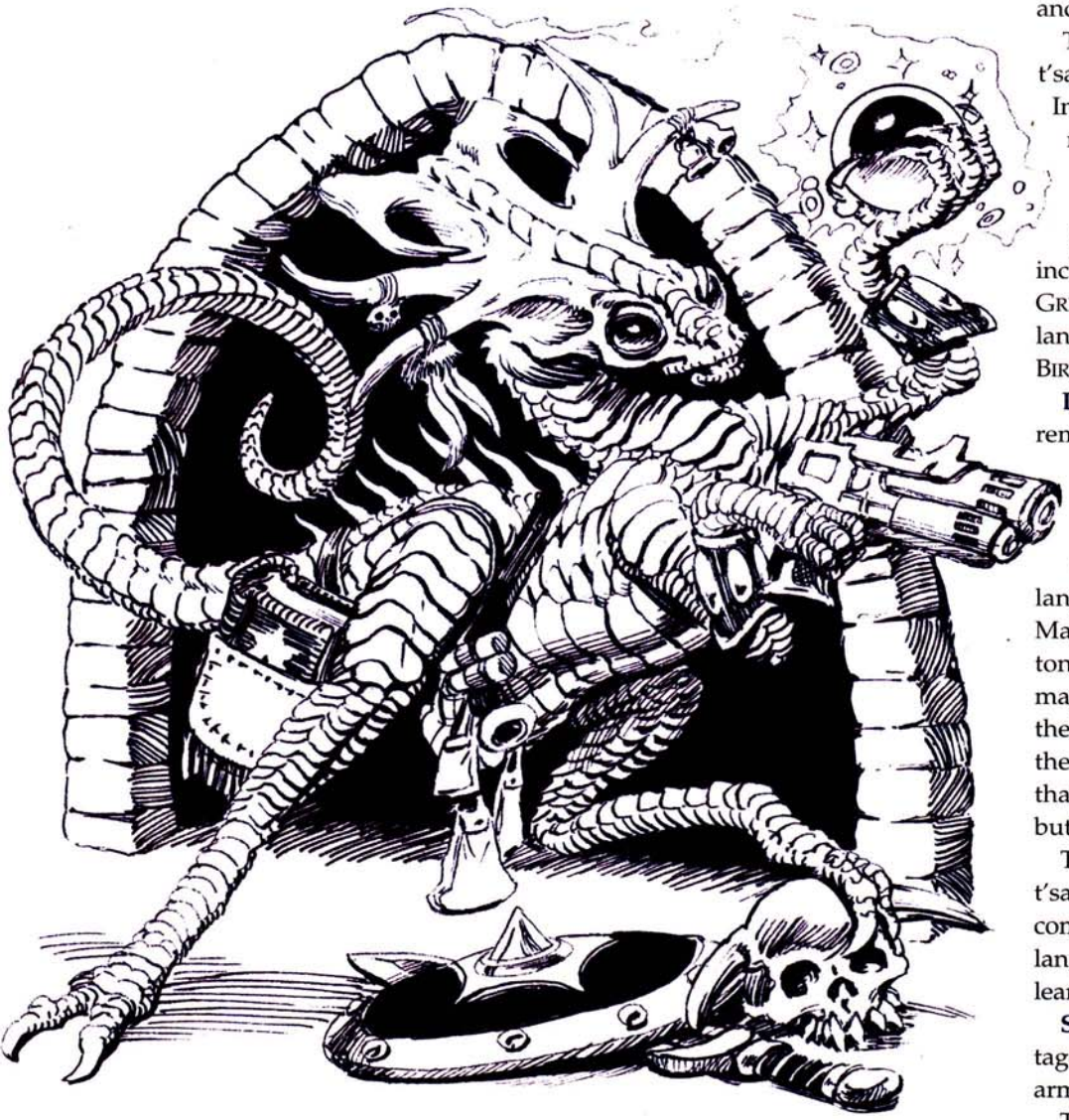
Class Restrictions

Class	Max. Level
Warrior	
Fighter	14
Ranger	10
Wizard	
Mage	10
Priest	
Cleric	6
Rogue	
Thief	Unlimited
Bard	8

Individual t'sa relations focus on the brood from which a t'sa emerges. While one t'sa may be the chief or mayor of a settlement, all of the leader's brothers enjoy a similarly high status. Yet given that t'sa aren't conformists, the actions of individual t'sa can make the social order seem chaotic and unintelligible to outsiders.

In t'sa society, an inferior, lower-caste brood pledges fealty to a higher-class one for protection, land, and support. Meanwhile, this higher brood may pledge itself to a still higher-ranking one, and so on. More than a dozen different caste levels seem to exist, all functioning under the management of a leader caste. This relationship among t'sa castes is called xakksha.

Two factors make this xakksha web of loyalties different from the typical feudal codes. First, given the ability of a single t'sa to change his brood's standing in society for good or ill, social mobility borders on the extreme. In theory, a t'sa brood could begin the month as little more than peasant, and end it sleeping in the perfumed and pillowed houses of nobility. For the last few decades, a moderate amount of stability has ruled over the highest brood castes, but it's typical that every fifty years or so, great



events—often at the hands of only a few—change t'sa society, bringing up new broods and new leaders.

Another characteristic that distinguishes t'sa society from human society is a lack of ignorance. It's no surprise that evolution produced a dextrous species, but it surprises many to discover how quickly t'sa learn new concepts. While the most intelligent humans can keep pace with the most clever t'sa, no t'sa falls below human average. In addition, every broodling caste of t'sa benefits from an education that provides reading skills. As a result, the t'sa do not suffer from many of the social ills that result from an uneducated population.

Intelligence doesn't mean perfection, however, and though t'sa don't seem vicious or ill-willed, legends abound with tales of t'sa villains as often as t'sa heroes. They also make clear that t'sa impulsiveness—sometimes even headstrong foolishness—has always been a part of the t'sa psyche.

The same legends reveal that, until recently, the t'sa demonstrated little concern about or belief in gods or an afterlife. The oldest legends make cursory references to a belief in reincarnation. Today, however, the ambitious t'sa have begun to embrace many of the gods of their new homeworld. While they can't account for the power of indigenous priests, they acknowledge its effectiveness. In this, though, the t'sa have the same approach to priestly powers as they do to wizardry. They remain dabblers in these new "sciences" of sorcery and priestcraft, still experimenting and often surprising themselves.

The most popular deities among the t'sa vary according to campaign setting. In the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, the most likely power is Oghma, from whom many t'sa priests hope to uncover details of their race's origin. Other popular deities among the t'sa include Chauntea and Tymora. In the GREYHAWK setting, Celestian and Fharlanghn are the most likely choices. In the BIRTHRIGHT setting, Sera and Avani.

Language: For as long as the t'sa can remember, a single language has been predominant in their history. Their oldest documents (see below) all use this script. Since the t'sa began to adapt to their world, however, the language has grown and changed. Many words from common human tongues—especially those involving magic and its principles—have made their way into the t'sa vocabulary. Now the t'sa language has changed so much that ancient script is unreadable to all but a few scholars.

Thanks to their extroverted nature, t'sa characters begin play knowing the common tongue in addition to their own language. Additional languages can be learned in the usual fashion.

Special Advantages: The two advantages of the t'sa biology are speed and armor.

T'sa armor (AC 4), as noted above, provides a significant edge over the fleshy, unprotected hides of most sentients. As a result, few t'sa ever don artificial armor; most armor can't match their own, and the few that could would be too encumbering for their small frames.

Incredible speed and reaction time may offer t'sa characters an even greater advantage during their careers. A t'sa receives a –2 bonus to any initiative roll. This bonus is cumulative with any other modifiers (*haste* or *slow* spells, high ground, etc.).

Special Disadvantages: T'sa suffer no special disadvantages as such. However, their small size and ability score adjustments make them ill-suited for careers as single-classed Warriors.

Even if the t'sa have existed in your campaign for years, their period of adjustment continues. Someday, their

inquisitive nature might make them completely familiar with the customs and cultures of their new world—but not yet.

Conversely, t'sa are often mistaken for other, often hated beings. While a skilled observer might notice several differences between a t'sa and other lizardlike humanoids, the average passerby isn't likely to realize that a t'sa is neither a lizard man nor a troglodyte. Even a completely peaceful t'sa entering a human or demihuman settlement is apt to encounter hostility and suspicion, if not immediate assault.

Weapon Proficiencies: Use of melee weapons is common among t'sa warriors. Their talons are little more effective than human fists when it comes to inflicting harm. The most common weapons among the t'sa are relatively short-bladed weapons like daggers and short swords. For missile weapons, the t'sa have taken to crossbows—mostly light crossbows. The use of such weapons is becoming common among the younger t'sa.

T'sa heroes can begin play with any of these weapons, or similar ones with the Dungeon Master's permission. Eventually, it should be possible for a t'sa to master all but the largest and heaviest human weaponry.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Most nonweapon proficiencies can be found in use among t'sa society. Proficiencies tied to the specifics of the setting, such as Local or Ancient History, are available only at the DM's discretion, once the t'sa have lived on their new world long enough to have learned them.

Starting Possessions: The amount of gear that a starting t'sa PC can expect is largely based on his brood's position within his community. Once the Dungeon Master and the player have determined his brood's position, feel free to double—or halve—the PCs starting allotment of equipment.

Roleplaying Suggestions: The one trait that marks all t'sa is inquisitiveness. Even in the last years of a short-lived life, the t'sa desire to discover and learn never fades.

Whether it is a result of their passion for learning or simply another racial characteristic, the t'sa have developed an almost reckless optimism. They have a positive outlook on life even in the worst situations. About the only things they avoid in life are the trite, dull, or mundane. Life is all about doing more, going somewhere, asking questions, and finding answers. T'sa want answers to the mysteries of life. How did they get here? Where are they going now?

Other Information: The t'sa are carnivores with a snout full of sharp teeth. Today, the t'sa continue to prefer meat over vegetarian foods, although they can survive on either.

T'sa have the normal chance to develop wild talents or psionics, if present in the campaign.

T'sa Artifacts

Long ago, according to their own legends, the t'sa were a great people who flew through the air and even the dark night beyond. Today, only a few reminders exist to prove that the t'sa once possessed a culture different—and much greater—than their current existence. The greatest of these mementos, other than stories told around a dinner table, are the t'sa artifacts. Scattered relics of an earlier age, these objects are a new form of treasure for your AD&D campaign.

Ultimately, it's up to you to decide the nature of these artifacts. They are most likely the last pieces of actual scientific technology, microscopic circuity completely beyond the understanding of the creator's current descendants. If you want to avoid introducing scientific gadgetry, perhaps these items are nothing more than representatives of a long-lost t'sa sorcery. Or t'sa artifacts can be something else entirely in your world: tokens of a lost god or even reservoirs of psionic energy.

Whatever their origin, the power behind t'sa artifacts has one important consequence: they don't work like spells and thus are immune to magic that affects other spells. For example, a t'sa artifact and its effects are unaffected by *dispel magic*, *anti-magic shell*, and even *Mordenkainen's disjunction*.

Another feature of t'sa artifacts is that they require no command or power words to activate. All of them are configured with small switches or buttons that activate or deactivate them. Once a t'sa—or any character—has seen the operation of one of these artifacts, he can use the artifact freely.

All t'sa artifacts, however, have a limited store of energy. Much like the charges of a wand or staff, a t'sa artifact can only by activated for so long, or so many times, before becoming depleted. The exact number of cell charges that an artifact contains depends on the individual artifact. Within each such device, a small cell (either a battery or a magical energy crystal, depending on your point of view), provides power to the artifact. After a cell is depleted, it must be replaced or recharged (see **Recharger,** below).

In addition to the t'sa artifacts detailed here, you can create additional artifacts of your own. Likely sources of inspiration can be found in technical journals, the description of gear in the ALTERNITY® game rulebooks (or any other science fiction game), and your own creative imagination.

Along with each device mentioned below, a note is included on the artifact's rarity among the t'sa. Charge cells are uncommon objects, and fewer than 10% of t'sa possess one. Most artifacts and charge cells are hoarded by a few leaders or t'sa heroes. Among other races, the appearance of these artifacts would be very rare, almost unique.

Adder (uncommon): The adder is a small device similar in function to an abacus. It is hand-held and lined with buttons. Although modern t'sa can use the device for addition and subtraction, they have been unable to determine its other, more complicated functions. The difficulty lies in translating old t'sa symbols.

The adder works for a total of thirty days of use before depleting its charge cell.

Airtight Armor (rare): A suit of relatively heavy (20 lbs.) armor, this artifact provides AC 6 protection versus attacks. More importantly, the armor is airtight. A backpack attached to the armor allows the user to breathe in airless environments. In addition, the suit can be heated

and cooled by its charge cell, allowing the wearer to survive in the hottest or coldest environments.

The charge cell can function for a total of eight hours of use, after which time the suit stops pumping fresh air or providing thermal protection. The suit automatically stores and compresses air when charged and doesn't need its air tanks refueled.

Darkseer (uncommon): This device resembles a *crystal ball* like the weather predictor (see below). The darkseer allows its user to detect objects and individuals, regardless of lighting conditions. Staring into the darkseer, the user can see it emit pulses of energy that reflect from all objects back to the darkseer. Then, the darkseer constructs a visual representation of the area within its viewing crystal.

The darkseer can detect invisible objects, creatures, and characters. After a total of 10 rounds of use, the darkseer depletes its charge crystal.

Decharger (very rare): The decharger is one of the most prized and protected artifacts of the t'sa, and only a dozen or so still exist. The decharger is an area of effect weapon resembling the more common lightwand. It has a range of 20 meters. When activated, all charge cells within 5 meters of the target become depleted. The decharger can fire only once before becoming depleted itself.

Farspeaker (uncommon): The farspeaker is a long-range communications device. Its maximum range is 100 miles. Two farspeakers are necessary for operation. Beyond this, the number of farspeakers that can be linked to the first two is unlimited. Serial linkage of farspeakers can extend the range. The farspeaker cannot penetrate substantial barriers such as yards of earth and stone. Each farspeaker becomes depleted after twenty-four total hours of use.

Lamplight (common): This artifact is nothing more than a small but powerful lantern. It sheds full lighting out to a radius of 120 feet. The lamplight can be used for up to twenty total hours before depleting its charge cell.

Lifter (rare): A small device that appears to be a metal strongbox at first glance, the lifter can be attached to any device of up to 20,000 lbs. Once attached, the lifter makes the object effectively weightless. It can then be pushed or pulled about without needing to account for its friction against a ground surface. The device operates for only one hour against its maximum weight but for correspondingly longer times against smaller weights (e.g., two hours for 10,000 lbs., twenty hours for 500 lbs., etc.)

If attached to an individual, the lifter doesn't allow flight, but it can allow a character to automatically succeed in any Climbing proficiency checks as long as the device is active.

Lightwand (uncommon): A wand with a trigger attached underneath, the lightwand can release small bolts of energy at a target. An attack roll is required, and normal missile bonuses apply. The range of the lightwand is 50/100/150, and it inflicts 1d6 + 2 points of damage on impact. It can be fired up to two times per round, but after a total of twenty shots the lightwand is depleted.

Lightrod (rare): Essentially a longer version of the lightwand, the lightrod has a greater range (80/160/240), greater damage (1d8 + 4) and greater rate of fire (three shots per round). The lightrod can fire only ten shots per charge cell. Unlike most t'sa artifacts, the lightrod can hold two charge cells, doubling its longevity.

Noisecopier (rare): A device about the size of a medium-sized beltpouch, the noisecopier resembles a cylinder covered with metal grills. The noisecopier has two modes of operation: copying and playing. After copying a noise, the device can replay the sound exactly. After a total of eight hours of copying or playing, the device becomes depleted.

Recharger (very rare): A device resembling a small table (4 feet square), the black, metal recharger can restore energy to a charge cell. First, a charge cell is placed within the small covered metal dish at the center of the recharger. Then, the recharger must rest in sunlight (partial cloudcover is okay, but full cloudcover is not) for a period of twelve hours. At the end of this time, the cell is fully recharged and ready for use.

Unfortunately, charge cells are not perfect. Each time a cell is recharged, there is a one-in-twenty chance that it fails to receive energy and becomes useless.

Shield Belt (very rare): A heavy belt worn around the wearer's waist, the shield belt surrounds its user with a protective field. When activated, the shield is visible as a haze in the air. The shield belt provides a –2 bonus to its wearer's Armor Class and a +2 bonus to saving throws from physical and energy attacks (including *fireball, color spray, disintegrate,* etc.). It takes one round to activate or deactivate the shield belt and can remain on for only 20 total rounds before becoming depleted.

Timekeeper (common): Nothing more than a small bracelet with flashing numbers, the t'sa proclaim that this device keeps perfect time. Of course, since the symbols that the watch displays are t'sa hieroglyphics, this assertion is difficult to prove to others; however, those who experiment with the timekeeper might find it useful in measuring such things as spell durations and the length of alchemical reactions.

The timekeeper functions for five years before becoming depleted.

Weather Predictor (uncommon): A device about the size and weight of the typical mystic's *crystal ball,* the weather predictor must be outside and turned on for at least twelve hours before it produces a prediction of weather to come in the next two days. The weather predictor actually speaks—in the t'sa language—when giving its prediction of temperature and precipitation, and it has a 90% accuracy.

The weather predictor is difficult to understand, even for t'sa. The artifact can be activated for as much as a week total before depleting its charge cell.

David Eckelberry is a designer and editor for the ALTERNITY *game and* STAR*DRIVE™ *setting, but his character's first encounter with armored reptilian humanoids didn't go well. When he first heard a description of the t'sa, his character opened fire with an automatic shotgun.*

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THE ECOLOGIES OF THE FIRENEWT & GIANT STRIDER

Hammer & Anvil

Of those who encounter the deadly firenewts and their terrible steeds, it is written that they shall die.

by
Paul F. Culotta

illustrated by
Terry Dykstra

"ARE YOU SURE YOU FEEL UP TO THIS, MUFTI? Grandfather will wait if you need more time to rest."

"I can manage, Letifa. I must," he grunted. With a lurch, Mufti got to his feet. His face, arms, chest, and feet were still wrapped in concealing gauze. The bandages covered the cooling salves that worked on his tortured, blistered skin. His long black hair was uncovered, as were his brown eyes. There were two holes in the gauze over his face: one for breathing, one for drinking. But he could stand and walk. Most importantly, he could speak. He had to speak. Mufti grimaced through the pain as Letifa dressed him in a black aba.

The glare of the merciless sun staggered Mufti as he and Letifa emerged from the tent. He clutched at her arm to steady himself. How long had he endured the sun's searing heat without burnoose or sandals? Men, women, and children squinted at the pair as they slowly walked toward the large tent at the center of the oasis. Many of the people whispered, and he could imagine what they were saying. How it was written that Mufti should have died, yet he had not. How no one had survived alone in the desert known as the Genie's Anvil without camel or water. Off to one side, the tribe's goats bleated anxiously, as if agreeing with their nomadic owners.

Mufti and Letifa entered the tent and immediately went to their knees, making obeisance to their leader, Mustafa al-Kor, Preserver of Knowledge, Enemy of the Ignorant, Protector of the Bedine, and Grandfather of the Wrath of the Old. With a gesture, he signaled them to rise. He sat amid a pile of fringed and tasseled pillows, puffing on his hookah. Today he was dressed in his black robes and turban. Mustafa's long mustache and beard were white. His face was wrinkled from the sun and his long years. He smiled wryly, showing that his teeth were still strong and white.

"Mufti, once again you have cheated death. This time it was rather close, no?"

"Grandfather, I must tell you ..."

"All in good time, Mufti. Letifa will take notes of your account as you speak, and I am anxious to hear it. It seems you have more lives than the Loregiver's cat, and you must start from the beginning. But first, have some juice. According to our healers, it is the best thing to drink after such an ordeal. And I expect you will share salt with me?"

Mufti took the proffered cup and drank deeply. Faint, dim memories returned. Plodding through an endless, white-hot hell, water gone. Falling, cursing the gods. Baking. Blackness. Excited voices. Water splashing on his face and body, then pouring down his throat. Finally awakening in the dark tent to Letifa's soothing voice, gently urging him to drink more. Screaming as the healers applied their ointments and bandages to his burnt skin. He slept.

Mufti gathered a pinch of salt from the nearby bowl and tasted it. He winced as it dissolved and seeped into his cracked lips. He quickly drank more of the juice and waited for the pain to subside. Meanwhile, Letifa went to a nearby chest and pulled out paper, pen, and ink.

"To begin with, grandfather, you recall that you assigned me to join the expedition to find the lost tomb of Anak-Raya. I did so, hiring on as the caravan barber."

"An excellent disguise. The training you had for the mission in Huzuz has had many uses," said Mustafa.

"Yes, grandfather. After many adventures, we finally reached the High Desert and ..."

"Oh no, Mufti. I want to hear it all! What adventures?"

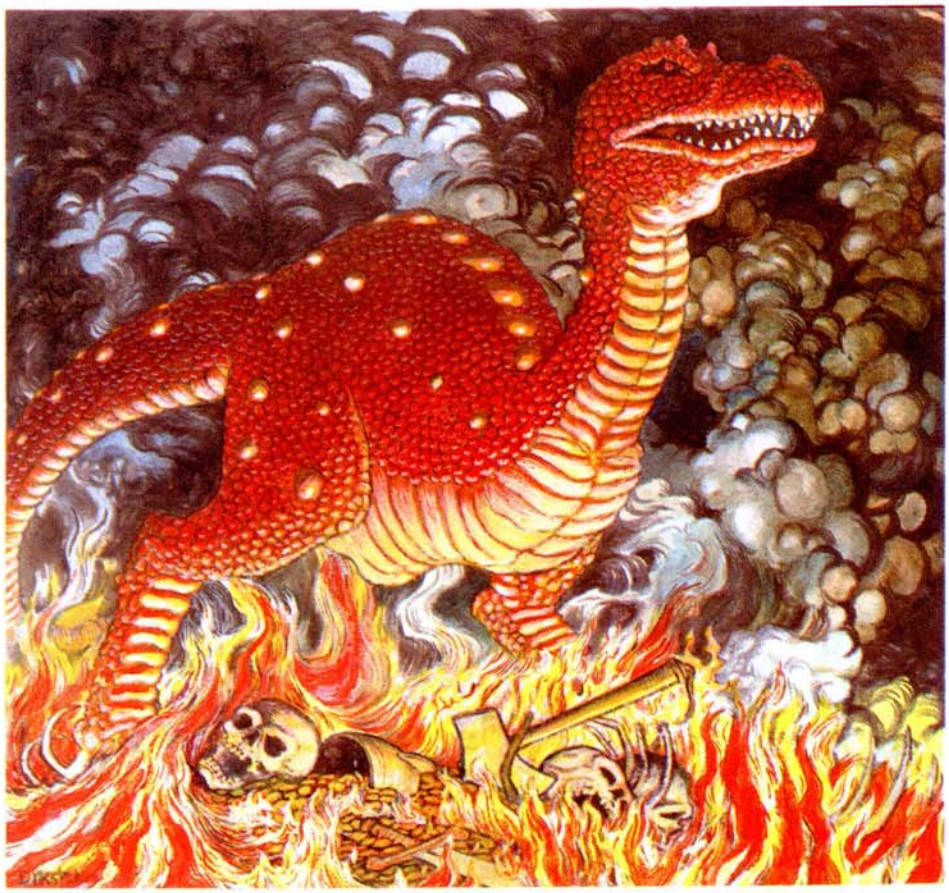
Mufti sighed impatiently. "Grandfather, I beg your indulgence. I know how you love a good story, but just hours from here is a lair of evil creatures that could attack and kill us all. Please let me tell this part to you first."

Mustafa frowned and puffed furiously on the hookah, causing clouds of smoke to billow around his head. He shouted, "Hassan!"

A tall, muscular man quickly came into the tent and knelt. "Yes, grandfather."

"Double the guard immediately! And the patrols as well!"

"As you wish, grandfather." Hassan scowled briefly at Mufti as he bowed his way out.



"Very well, Mufti, continue."

"Thank you, grandfather. As I was saying, we entered the High Desert and, after days of searching, found the tomb. Several of the workers died from hideous traps that Anak-Raya had left for looters, but in the end we found the Scrolls of Destiny. As you suspected, they were large rolls of papyrus in gold cylinders."

"And no doubt Sadam al-Tajar was incensed when you approached him and made him our offer to, ah, relieve him of the Scrolls?" Mustafa grinned.

"Frankly, grandfather, I was waiting until we were closer to this oasis where I was to meet you with the scrolls. But I never got the chance to make the offer. Two days after leaving the tomb, we were attacked by creatures I had never seen before. As you know, Sadam had hired many guards, many of them fearless desert riders rarely surprised by enemies. But as we traveled through a sandy gorge, several heavily armed monsters wielding pikes and swords burst out of the sands on our right flank.[1] They were dark brown, lizardlike beings that stood and fought upright like men. Worse yet, they breathed fire on the camels and stabbed them with spears, which greatly panicked the beasts and put the entire caravan in an uproar."[2]

"Mufti, excuse me. My report must be complete. What time of day was this? And how large were these creatures?" asked Letifa, who was scribbling furiously.

"It was about two hours after sunrise. The creatures were a little taller than me, or about as tall as Hassan."[3]

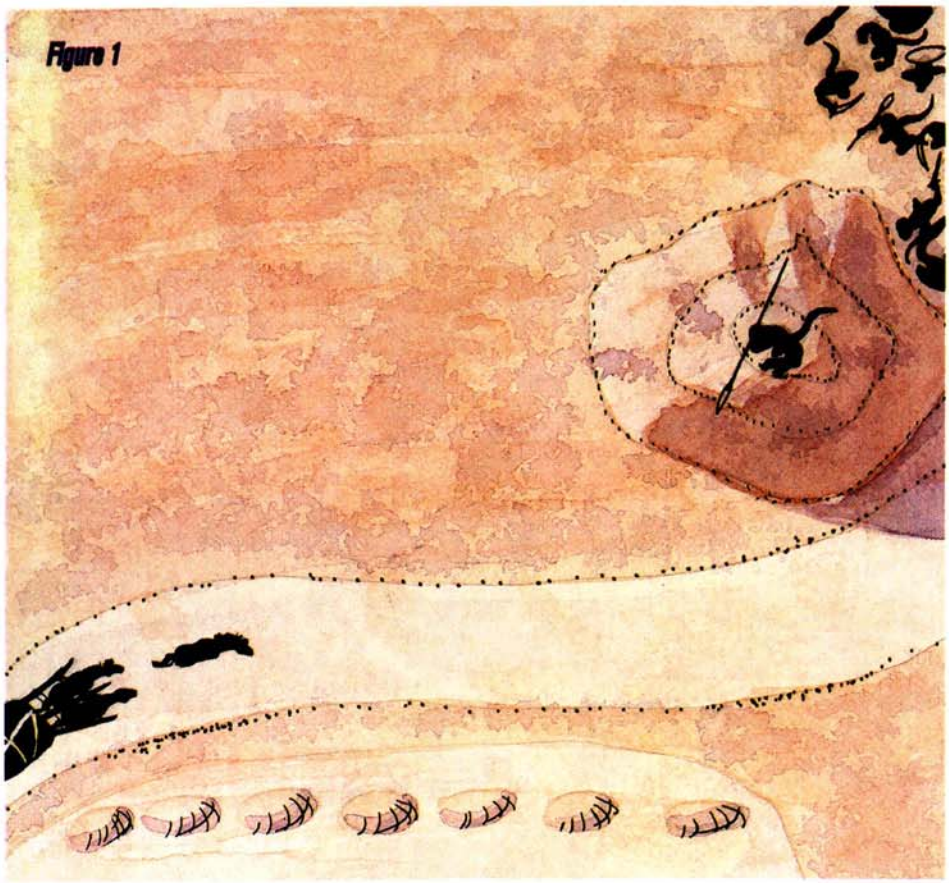
"Thank you. Please continue."

"Grandfather, the fight was terrible.

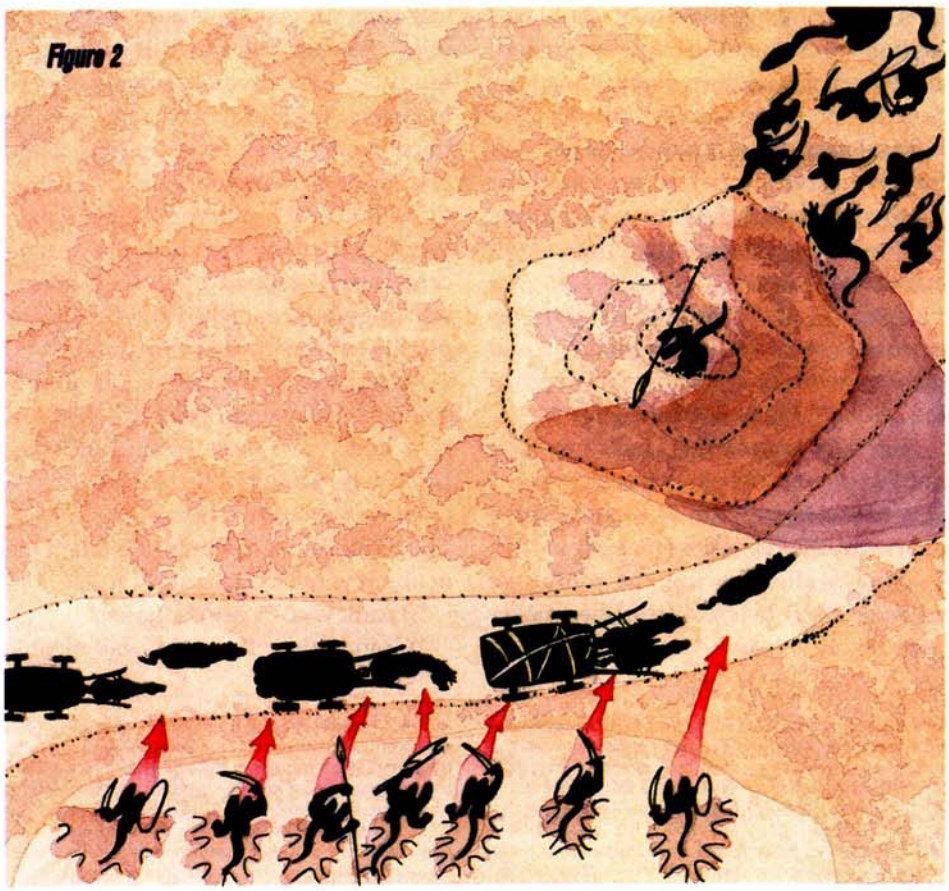
1. Firenewts are generally encountered in volcanic regions, but they may be found in any area of extremely hot temperatures, such as a desert. Their coloration varies from dark brown to a grayish brown that becomes white around the belly, although the belly is no softer than the rest of the creature, and they can easily bury themselves in sand and remain hidden with only their noses and eyes (which look like rocks) sticking out. Most PCs have only a 5% chance of noticing anything strange when walking into a firenewt ambush. Rangers and PCs with the Survival (Desert) proficiency have a 10% chance, while Desert Riders have a 15% chance. PCs with the Alertness NWP gain a 5% bonus.

2. Attacking mounts first is a favorite firenewt tactic. As carnivores, they appreciate the large amount of meat that a horse, camel, or elephant provides. Moreover, killing the mounts ensures that no one can ride away. If the victims of the firenewts' attack prevail in battle (or escape), then they are without mounts, which means that they face a long walk home and probably won't survive. Firenewts focus their attacks on mounts for the first 3 rounds of combat or until at least half the mounts are down before turning to the riders.

3. Firenewts can not abide the coldness of the desert night and do not set ambushes until at least an hour after sunrise. This is yet another good reason for traveling the desert only at night and stopping promptly when the sun comes up.



The ambushers await their victims.



As the first attackers burst from the sands, reinforcements await their command..

At that point, I dropped my disguise as the caravan barber and fought with the others. I found myself pitted against a creature clad in chain armor ..."

"In this heat?" Mustafa exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, and it fought like a mamluke, the way it wielded that battleax.[4] Had it not been for my training, I most likely would have died. As it turned out, after a few moments of dodging the creature's heavy blade, I finally drove my dagger into the creature's eye. With a final gasp, it shot fire on my robe."

"I heard about the burns on your chest, Mufti. From what the healers tell me, the scars will be permanent. I am sorry for this, but please continue. Did you escape and make your way here?"

Mufti snorted and then grimaced in pain.

"I wish that I had. Men and camels were dying everywhere, but Waleed, our guard commander, had rallied us. Just as we were fighting the creatures to a standstill, we heard high-pitched horns and a muted drumming behind us. I turned. Thundering down on us were at least forty giant two-footed lizards, each as large as a camel and bearing a lizard-beastman with a lowered pike.[5] As they charged at us, the giant lizards made a terrible screeching noise, and several of the guards fled, only to be speared in the back or trampled into the dust.[6]

4. While there is one elite Warrior (3+3 HD, AC 3) for every ten firenewts, there is a 30% chance that this Warrior has weapon specialization (+1 to attack rolls, +2 to damage rolls, 3/2 attacks, 420 XP).

5. Giant striders are not lizards, but large, flightless birds. Although firenewts primarily use the giant striders as mounts, when one outlives its usefulness (usually no longer than fifteen years) it is slaughtered for food, and its inedible parts scavenged to make other products. Firenewts fashion saddles from the creatures' tough leathery skins, saddle bindings from tendons and ligaments, and signal horns from bones. Nothing goes to waste in firenewt culture.

6. The second feature of the classic firenewt ambush occurs when the victims are totally engaged in battle with the first group of firenewts that emerged from the sands. At this point, the leader of the dismounted firenewts signals with a polished stone, metal shield, or horn to a concealed band of firenewts mounted on giant striders. At the signal, this group charges from its concealed position and lays into the defenders' rear, causing maximum shock and panic. Just before impact, the giant striders are trained to bellow ferociously, and their terrible cries cause all NPC defenders to make a morale check. The firenewts call this ambush the "hammer and anvil," with the firenewts on foot being the anvil, and those charging on striders being the hammer. The result, combined with the defenders' loss of mounts, is usually a bloody rout. Figures 1–4 graphically depict the hammer and anvil strategy.

"Jaheira, the flame sorceress who had accompanied us, cast a ball of fire at this group, which heartened me greatly. Alas, her magic did little. The blast knocked some of the riders off their mounts, but the big lizards kept coming as if nothing would stop them. Indeed, when they came close, balls of fire blew out of their eyes as they all converged on Jaheira. I was knocked flat by the explosions, and when I looked up, there was nothing left of her except one charred slipper. It was then that something hit me in the head and all went black."[7]

In a mass charge, mounted firenewts use long pikes that inflict double damage. The normal bonus and penalty for a charge apply. A victim struck by the pikes must make a Strength check (–5 penalty) or be knocked to the ground and trampled by the giant strider for an additional 1d10 points of damage. If the firenewt rider misses with his pike, the giant strider gains a separate attack roll with the same mechanic (–5 penalty to Strength check; 1d10 points of trample damage if knocked down).

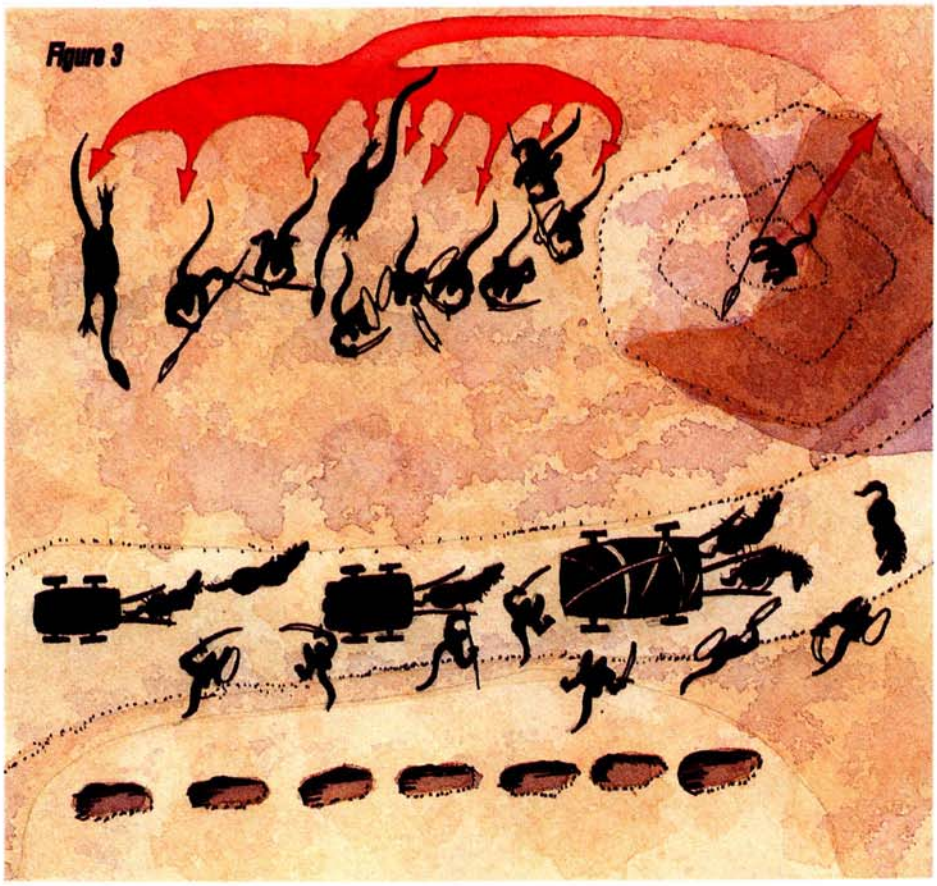
If one must travel in the desert during the day, the best way to avoid the hammer and anvil is for the caravan to have someone with flying magic reconnoiter ahead and spot the "hammer" element. Those who do not have such means are strongly advised to have a screen of riders posted ahead and to the flanks of the caravan. In game terms, aerial reconnaissance has a 65% chance of spotting the "hammer" while screening riders have only a 40% chance (+5% for each rider who is a Ranger, has the Desert Rider kit from *Arabian Adventures*, or who has the Desert Survival nonweapon proficiency).

A variation of the hammer and anvil tactic occurs in volcanic regions. Firenewts call this tactic the fire box. In this case, a few firenewts mounted on striders slowly flee in plain sight from armed opponents. They lead their pursuers to an area where the opponents are channeled by a cliff on one side and a pool of lava on the other. At the end of this passage are three ranks of dismounted firenewts with bristling pikes firmly set to receive any charge. Behind the firenewts is a Priest who first casts *pyrotechnics* (smoke effect), causing the channel to become obscured and possibly causing wayward opponents to plunge into the lava. A blown horn signals a unit of mounted firenewts to fall upon the rear of the pursuers. As the opponents are trapped by dismounted firenewts, a cliff, lava, and mounted firenewts, the Priest casts a unique firenewt spell, *lava splash*, which causes lava to splash onto the opponents and their mounts. Firenewt Priests may cast this spell three times a day. The details of this spell are in the sidebar.

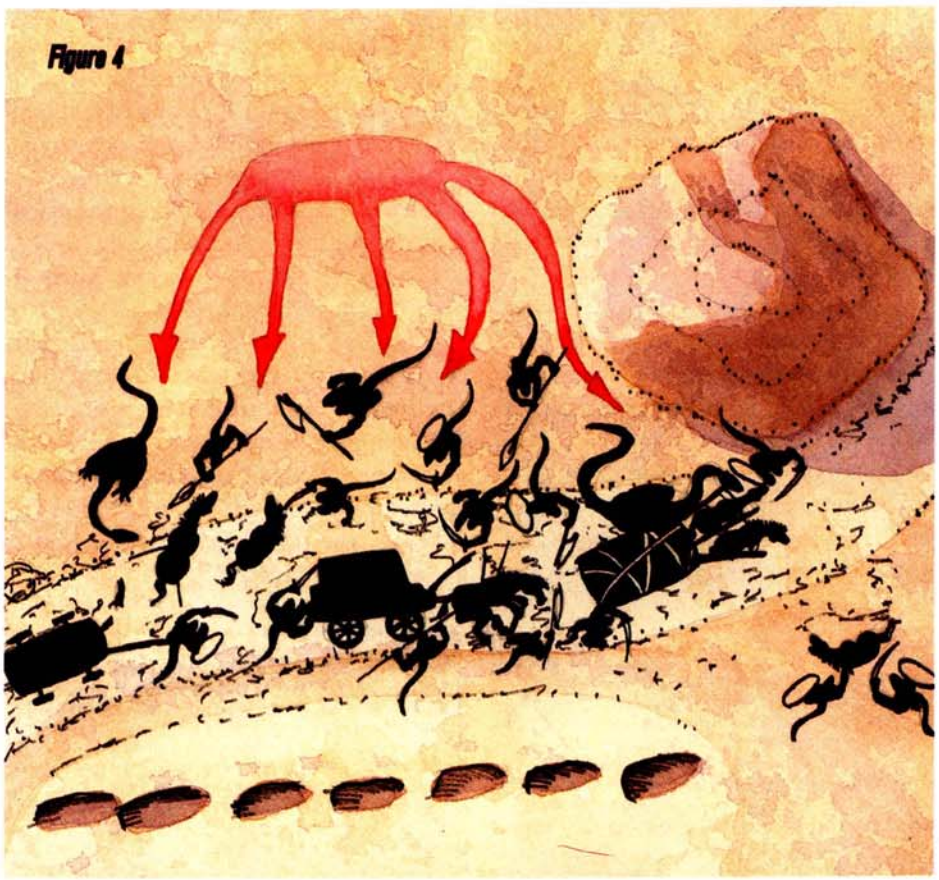
7. As the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ book points out, giant striders are immune to magical fire; indeed, intense heat, such as that produced by a *fireball*, acts as a *cure light wounds* spell on a giant strider. Lesser fire effects (*burning hands*, Greek fire, etc.) cure 1–6 hit points of damage. Because giant striders receive healing benefits from fire, typically one of the first priorities after battle is for the firenewts to breathe fire on badly wounded giant striders.

Giant striders are also trained to fight even when their riders are knocked off. Furthermore, they are trained to focus their *fireballs* on any defender who attempts to use magic.

Firenewts are not immune to magical fire, but they do receive a +3 to their saving throws, and all damage is reduced by 1 point per die of damage.



While the victims fight the first attackers, reinforcements take their positions.



Finally, the reinforcements attack from the rear.

"Somehow you awoke and wandered here? Surely Fate was kind to you."

"Oh, how I wish that were the case, grandfather. When I awoke, I found myself in a dark cavern, chained to the wall, along with dozens of my comrades. The chamber was intensely hot, made so by a mound of glowing, heated rock off to one side.[8]

"We lingered there for days. Each day, several of the creatures would come. One wore a beaten metal breastplate with a design of a bonfire on the chest, and it was he who would examine us, give us a little food or water, then poke at us with his heavy mace. Finally, he would hiss something and point at one of the prisoners. The others then fell upon the designated prisoner and dragged him off to a neighboring chamber where we heard his screams for hours. We would never see him again. Grandfather, I have known fear before on many occasions, but never have I been so terrified as when those creatures would appear each day to make their selection."[9]

"So how did you escape such a place?" asked Mustafa.

"One day I awoke and noticed that one of the chain links was weak and thin. I twisted the chain several times until the link snapped cleanly. From there, I was able to pick the lock on the other manacle and free myself."

"May the Old One be praised!" exclaimed Letifa softly.

"Two of those few comrades who remained were dead. The rest were so weak they could not even stand. I had to leave them." Mufti spoke carefully. He would not shame his order by breaking down.

Mustafa put down the tube from his hookah and came over to Mufti, putting his arms around him and patting him gently on the back. "You did what was necessary, grandson. Think on it no more. It was their fate to die," he said.

Mustafa poured Mufti another cup of juice and gently urged him to continue.

"I went through their caverns, keeping to the shadows, close to the walls as I have been taught, trying desperately to find a way out. There were numerous chambers filled with the beastmen, their lizard mounts, and more of the ones with the metal breastplates."

"What of the place where you heard the screams?" interrupted Mustafa.

Mufti looked at the ground and shook his head. "Please, grandfather, I do not wish to talk about it. Maybe later, but not now."

"Well, yes, later is good," he replied. "But can you tell us how many of these creatures there were and whether they took the scrolls?"

Mufti shook his head. "No, I cannot say exactly how many there were because I did not explore all the caverns. I only wanted to get out. From what I saw, there were at least two hundred, and about half that many of the giant lizards."

"That many!"

"Yes, not all of them were as large as the warriors, and I assume these were females. They were colored differently too, a dull brown. As to the scrolls, yes, they took them, but I could not get them."

"Why not?"

"One of the chambers I passed had

8. Giant striders become sluggish in cold temperatures found in such places as the desert night or underground. Their droppings, however, retain heat for up to ten hours in confined areas and keep any cavern lair toasty. Oddly, the droppings have no odor. They look like piles of oozy rock, and anyone unfortunate enough to step in a pile suffers 1–6 points of heat damage. Fortunately, they are easily detectable, as they glow with as much light as a torch.

9. Although a tribe of firenewts is ruled by an overlord, the day-to-day activity is run by the priesthood. Firenewt Priests worship Kossuth, the tyrant-king of fire elementals, and receive their spells from that entity. It is the Priests who designate which captive human or humanoid becomes the daily meal (after a grueling torture routine) since such prisoners are considered delicacies. Humanoid prisoners (dwarves, gnomes, elves, orcs, etc.) are always the first to be selected. The Priests typically keep the juiciest tidbits for themselves and dole out the rest to the Warriors. Offal (entrails, organs, brains, etc.) is given to the giant striders.

Occasionally Priests, elite Warriors, and overlords may (50% chance) speak Common, but they usually do not choose to do so, since to them, it is just speaking to "food."

Water is an ingested poison to firenewts and giant striders (victims must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die; a successful save results in 1d12 points of damage) and is thus a commodity closely regulated by the firenewt priesthood. Not only is it used to sustain prisoners (firenewts like "fresh" meat), but the Priests use it to kill rivals and to give aged giant striders a "merciful" death.

three beastmen, who bowed and hissed strange noises before an idol of pure gold. Their idol was fashioned in the form of a pillar of fire, the same design as on their breastplates.[10] Behind it were the scrolls and several other possessions taken from the caravan, including my daggers. There were three of these creatures and I had no weapons."

"I see," murmured Mustafa disappointedly.

"But in the same chamber was a small stream of water with several bottles nearby. Fortunately it was close to the entry, and I was able to steal one of the bottles and fill it without discovery. That was the only water I saw in the entire place. A little while later, I found the way out."

Grandfather leaned forward, a gleam in his eye. "It was lightly guarded?"

"Two guards, both now dead," replied Mufti. "I crept up to them, snatched a sword from one's scabbard, and killed it quickly. The other took just a few moments more."

"You had no sword when we found you."

"No, after hours in the heat, I left it. As I left the water jug when it was empty."

"Ah, yes. I remember," replied Grandfather. "It was fortunate that the patrol found you. Many have whispered that your coming here bodes ill, for it was written that you should die."

"Fate is fickle, grandfather, but apparently it was not written, because I am here alive and well, thanks be to the Old One."

"How did you find your way here?"

"In the distance, grandfather, I saw the peak known as the Turban. Between it and the location of the sun, I determined the general direction I had to travel to reach you."

"Mufti, were there any other chambers in the lair that seemed unusual?" asked Letifa.

"Just one. One large cavern had a number of huge eggs lying in holes in the ground. There must have been at least fifty of them, each surrounded by piles of glowing rock. Several of the two-legged lizards kept watch in that place. The heat of the chamber was oppressive, and I dared not go in.

"A strange thing occurred after I left, though. I remember hearing what sounded like an explosion coming from that direction. I feared that perhaps it was an alarm of some sort, and I found a large crack to hide in for a while, but nothing came by. What this had to do with the eggs and the lizards I cannot say."[11]

Mustafa leaned back into his pillows and puffed thoughtfully. One of his eyebrows arched up, and he asked, "Mufti, do you think you could find this place again?"

Mufti paused, thought a few moments, and then answered, "Grandfather, your will is mine. I can try to lead you there, but even if the entire Wrath of the Old were assembled ..."

"Oh, but it is. Every member is here."

Mufti gaped at this statement. The Wrath had hundreds of members all over Zakhara, and they had all been brought here? What was in those Scrolls of Destiny?

10. The idol is a likeness of Kossuth, their deity. Although the Overlord doles out wealth from a communal hoard, the Priests receive the lion's share of it. Their belief is that the larger the idol of Kossuth, the greater the blessings he bestows upon them. When a sufficient amount of new gold is amassed, firenewt metalworkers melt it down along with the old idol and cast a larger one. Small tribes of firenewts have an idol worth at least 500 gp while larger tribes have idols worth up to 3,000 gp, and there is one tribe rumored to have an idol worth 10,000 gp. Obviously, the problem with looting a firenewt lair is transporting such a heavy thing back to civilization.

11. Giant strider eggs require considerable heat for incubation. Not only are they surrounded by heated droppings but also at least six giant strider hens remain with the eggs. They provide security against intruders, and they shoot a *fireball* into the chamber, one per turn, showering more heat down on the eggs. This makes the entire chamber a constant 170 degrees. The eggs are impervious to the heat and may be used as components in making *potions of fire resistance*.

Firenewt eggs are taken to a special hatching ground guarded by one Priest, an elite Warrior servant, and two giant striders. The eggs are kept warm, just like the giant strider eggs, although less heat is required. Firenewt eggs are not used in the making of potions or other magical items. When a firenewt hatches, it tears its way out of its thick egg casing as the Priest looks on. If it fails to emerge from the egg in one turn, it is deemed too weak to remain alive, and the Priest tears it out of the egg and sacrifices it to Kossuth. This is a rare occurrence and is looked upon as a sign that Kossuth is displeased with the tribe. In actuality, the priesthood often uses this as an excuse to eliminate the bloodlines of their enemies.

New Priest Spell: *Lava Splash*

Level: 3
(Alteration)
Sphere: Elemental (Fire, Earth)
Range: 50 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: 10' × 10' area
Saving Throw: Neg.

Lava splash is available only to firenewt Priests of Kossuth. They may cast it up to three times per day as long as they are in Kossuth's favor. These are not bonus spells, so each spell counts against the Priest's number of spells per day. *Lava splash* seems to be a minor variation of an *earthquake* spell, although it affects only lava pools and streams, not the underlying hard ground.

When the Priest casts this spell, he causes a wave of lava to rise up and shower anything within a 25' radius. Victims suffer 3–18 points of damage, although a saving throw vs. breath weapon reduces the damage by half. Victims in metal armor who fail their saving throw are treated in following rounds as if affected by a *heat metal* spell. Victims not in metal armor who fail their saving throw must make additional item saving throws for their clothing. If a character's clothing is ignited by a *lava splash*, he suffers an additional 1–6 points of damage per round for 3 rounds. The *lava splash* never harms a firenewt or giant strider. Indeed, a *lava splash* heals either creature as a *cure serious wounds* spell.

The material component for this spell is a fist size lump of volcanic rock, which is consumed in the casting. The spell may not be cast unless there is also a pool of lava within 50 yards of the caster.

"Even so, grandfather, it would be a bloodbath, and our losses would be heavy. You know that my escape has been discovered by now. The creatures' lair will be well guarded."

Mustafa laughed heartily before answering. "In two hours, the sun will set. These creatures will all be inside their caves, and we can go there quickly by camel. In our camp are sorcerers who have spells of ice and water magic, something I suspect that these beastmen and their lizards will fear. In any case, I don't believe that they will expect anyone to attack them."

Mustafa finished this announcement with a wide smile, but just then the faint sounds of horns blowing in the distance drifted in through the opening.

Letifa stopped her writing and looked up quickly. "The patrols, they have found something!" she exclaimed.

Grandfather no longer smiled; he sprang to his feet quickly. Now a faint drumming, thumping noise came through the tent, along with shouts as nomads rushed about outside.

Mufti sighed and shook his head wearily. "I have heard those horns before, grandfather. Not all of them are ours. Nor is that other noise."

"What are you saying?" demanded Mustafa.

Mufti arose, walked stiffly to a stack of weapons in one corner of the tent, and selected two fine scimitars and a bandoleer of daggers, each inscribed with the symbol of the Old One. He handed one of the scimitars to Mustafa al Kor, the Grandfather of Assassins.

"Grandfather, perhaps it *was* written that I should die. Will you fight at my side?"[12]

One of Paul's regular players is a bewitching young lady named Summer who often brings homemade salsa to the game. Some of the guys say that it bubbles and steams; others believe that it would break a geiger counter's needle. Paul suspects it's really Summer's special potion of polymorph other *that will turn the DM into a firenewt if he isn't nice to her character.*

12. Firenewts are noted for their extreme sadism. One of their favorite jokes is to trick a prisoner like Mufti into thinking he has escaped and let him sneak about through the lair until he finds his way out or is killed in the process. Sometimes the prisoner is totally unmolested and given a healthy head start before any pursuit begins. Firenewts consider it great sport to allow the escapee to get just to the brink of rescue, at which point they swoop down and take him prisoner again.

The firenewts have no fear of the prisoner getting away because the giant striders have extremely sensitive olfactory glands that allow them to track a scent that's as much as three days old. The only real chance a pursued prisoner has is to be caught in a sandstorm that might blow away the scent, to run into powerful allies, or to enjoy some other quirk of fate. Even so, surviving a sandstorm is no easy feat (see p. 82, *Arabian Adventures*), and if an escapee finds rescue, the pursuing firenewts are sure to either attack or go back for reinforcements.

Gamer's Guide

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Role Models

An Embarrassment of Riches

Choosing Miniatures for Your AD&D® Campaign

By Jim Bishop and J.D. Wiker

Photography by Craig Cudnohufsky

AD&D® players are spoiled by their miniatures choices. With so many models on the market, it's easy to feel overwhelmed or—worse yet—to be afraid to buy miniatures for fear of spending too much. But a few simple tips can keep the players happy and the campaign moving without bankrupting the DM.

First, divide your miniatures list into two categories: PCs and everything else. If the players don't buy the PC figures themselves, take a little extra care. Players identify strongly with their characters, so be sure to note personal heraldry and favorite weapons, as well as the usual concerns of class, age, sex, and race. Don't be afraid to be picky: some miniatures lines (like Ral Partha's AD&D Player Characters) are designed to match individualistic characters.

The "everything else" shopping basket can become overfilled and expensive without proper planning. Make a list of the most common creatures the PCs will encounter in the near future. If an ogre clan is getting feisty or the drow are poised to invade, those figures should come first. Random encounters and "friendlies" can come later, if at all.

As a general rule, start by buying half of the maximum "No. Appearing" value for a basic monster type. If more are rolled for the encounter, either use proxies (similar-looking figures are best, but a saltshaker will do) or treat the encounter as two different waves of attackers, with the second wave appearing when the first is almost exhausted. For truly numerous monsters, such as orcs and kobolds, wise DMs splurge on at least a dozen models and expect to use a lot of proxies.

Important or recurring enemies should be purchased with as much consideration as the PC figures themselves. Whether the PCs face a death knight, a drow prince, or an ancient green dragon in that final, cataclysmic battle, the bad guy needs to look *bad*. Shop around, check with experienced painters in the area, and scour the websites for exactly the right figure.

Painting Priorities

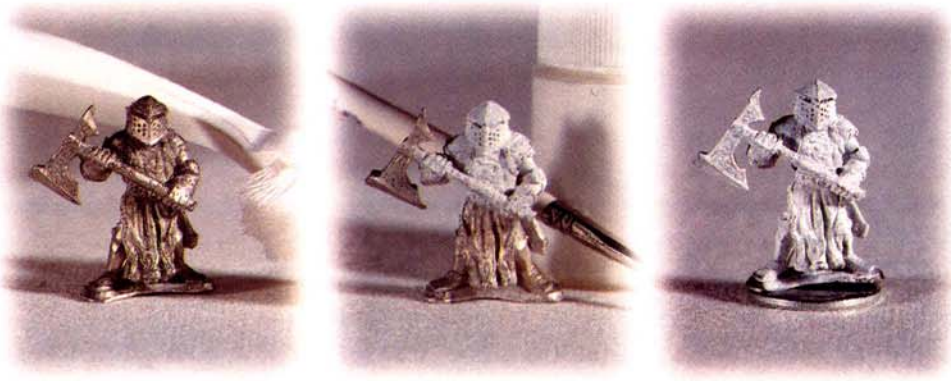
Preparing miniatures for AD&D gaming shouldn't take long if approached with the right strategy. The most

Cleaning, Undercoats, and Bases

Miniatures don't come ready to paint right out of the package. They often still have grease from the mold, which is invisible but keeps paint from covering smoothly. Clean them using an old toothbrush and some dish soap. Once they're dry, give the figures a white undercoat—just enough to cover them without obscuring detail—to help the next layers of paint stick to the figures.

If a figure has only a small base, it might tend to fall over during play, chipping your great paint job. One cheap solution is to stick the figure to a small metal washer using super glue.

Tool	Approximate Price
Hobby brush	$2
White acrylic paint	$3
Glue	$3
Washers (50)	$1



Clean your miniature before applying a base coat. A metal washer can make a good base.

important figures, and the first on the "To Paint" list, are the PCs. If the players aren't sure how they feel about gaming with miniatures, they'll have a change of heart when they see their beloved characters decked out in living color. A painted party also focuses the player's attention on them to the exclusion of the plain-metal monsters. It's important to know who the heroes are.

Next on the list is the party's main adversary. It's important for the DM to have this model ready as early as possible in the campaign, especially if it is scheduled for a preliminary encounter to get the players properly frightened. Putting a painted "monster" on the table tells the party they are in trouble, possibly serious trouble, and adds extra punch to the DM's description of the encounter.

Third and last on the list are the basic monsters the PCs will be fighting through most of the campaign. Since free time should be spent gaming, not getting ready to game, shrewd DMs paint hordes of monsters with spray paint, say light brown, and then add a few notes of detail to the eyes, weapons, and armor.

Truly dedicated DMs paint recurring "friendlies"; the patrons, innkeepers, henchmen, high priests, and sages the party deals with week after week. While this is nice, it's not necessary.

Sample Encounter: Keep Them Guessing

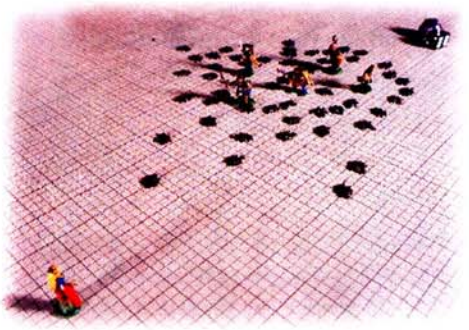
In this encounter, the player characters (PCs) are pursuing a fugitive—a gnome Illusionist who uses his magic for crime. He has escaped the authorities, recovered his spellbook, and is now fleeing into the wilderness. The PCs have caught up with him on the edge of a large, sandy area. As he sees them approaching, he runs across the sand. As the heroes follow, though, the sand begins to churn, and six giant ants crawl up, searching for the source of the disturbance atop their home. Thinking quickly, the gnome casts a *phantasmal force* illusion of more ants.

Place one plastic ant (they cost $1.50 for around a hundred) on the table for each of the PCs and roll for surprise.

Plastic bugs make an inexpensive but effective addition to your miniatures collection.

After the first round of combat, the gnome's spell is cast, and another 1d6 ants appear. Roll for surprise again, as the gnome makes the illusionary ants appear to burrow up out of the ground—as real ant reinforcements do the same. Only the new ants might gain surprise this round, since the characters are obviously already aware of their first attackers. Repeat this process each round until the Illusionist's spell ends. Note that the new ants are also a mix of illusions and the real thing.

The PCs can't distinguish between real and illusionary ants without striking them. But because they are swarming all around the combat, keeping track of any given ant is virtually impossible. Whenever a PC hits an ant, roll 1d6. On a roll of 4–6, the ant is real. The same roll should be made if a character tries to disbelieve the illusion, letting an ant attack him or her. Players can call for a re-roll, however, if their characters have spent the previous round not fighting,



Determine which ants are illusions with a die roll.

watching how the ants react to each other. (The real ants completely ignore the illusionary ones.)

A former Vermonter and avowed foe of the work ethic, Jim's mini collection could choke a goat. J.D. advocates painting to theme music, preferably movie soundtracks.

Miniatures Links and Newsgroups

Ral Partha Miniatures: www.ralpartha.com/
Reaper Miniatures: www.reapermini.com/DefaultR.htm
Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures: home.fuse.net/tbolt/
Nexus Gaming Links: www.sky.net/~pvccdc/nexus.htm
The Miniatures Page: www.jps.net/minipage/
rec.games.miniatures
rec.games.miniatures.misc

Convention Calendar

MARCH

ConJuration 4

March 5–6 ✻

William Shatner Building, McGill University, Québec, Canada. Events: roleplaying, LARP, board games, miniatures, CCGs, movies, panels, workshops, and more. Registration: $7 (Canadian) at the door. For more information contact: McGill Gamer's Guild, 3480 McTavish St., Montreal, Quebec, Canada PQ H2A 1X9.

MegaCon '99

March 5–7 FL

Orlando Expo Centre, Orlando, FL. Special Guests: Terry Brooks and Alex Ross. Events: gaming tournaments, demos, panels, 24-hour anime room, plus an art show and auction. Contact: Quantum Cat Entertainment, 270 Orange Terrace, Winter Park, FL 32789.

CosCon 99

March 12–14 PA

Days Inn Conference Center Butler, PA. Events: RPGA® Network tournaments, LIVING CITY™ events, benefit tournaments, CCGs, board games, miniatures, free-form roleplaying, dealer's area, new game demos, computer room, and movies. Contact: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003.

CoastCon XXII

March 12–14 MS

The President Casino's Broadwater Beach Resort East, US Hwy 90, Biloxi, MS. Guests: Patricia Tallman (*Babylon 5*), Bruce Campbell (*Army of Darkness, Xena, Brisco County Jr.*), Larry Elmore (artist), Apollo Smile (live action anime girl), P.N. "Pat" Elrod (author), Randy Richards (author), Sharon Green (author), Mike Shoemaker (comics), Sydney Williams (comics), Michael Liebmann (filking), Wesley Snipes (*Blade*). Events: Celebrity autographs, costume contest, art show, auction, writing contest, merchants area, 24-hour gaming (board, tournaments, collectible card, miniatures), networked computer gaming, LARP, video rooms, performances by Apollo Smile, dance, AD&D® GREYHAWK® Fan club sponsored seminar and events, hospitality suite, and more. Registration: $25 until March 1, or $30 at the door. Contact: P.O. Box 1423, Biloxi, MS 39533-1423. E-mail: info@coastcon.org. Web: www.coastcon.org.

Stellar Con 23

March 19–21 NC

Holiday Inn, Market Square, High Market, NC. Guests: Aaron Allston, Steven S. Long, Jack L. Chalker, Jody Lynn Nye, Sean Patrick Fannon. Registration: $15 before January 1, $20 between January 1 and March 1, $30 after. Contact: Stellar Con 23, Box 4, Elliot University Center, UNCG, Greensboro, NC 27412. Website: www.uncg.edu/student.groups/sf/stellarcon.htm.

Egyptian Campaign

March 26–28 IL

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Midsouthcon 17

March 28–28 TN

Sheraton Four Points Hotel, Memphis,

Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

To ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

Warning: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility.

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UriCon VIII

March 26–28 **RI**

Memorial Union, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI. Events: roleplaying, miniatures, board games, CCGs, LARPs, various Games Workshop games, AD&D tournament, various White Wolf games. Contact: UriCon VIII, University of Rhode Island, Union Express, 50 Lower College Rd. Box 2888, Kingston, RI 02881.

APRIL

Northeast Wars VII

April 9–11 **VT**

Radisson Hotel, Burlington, VT. Events: AD&D, *Vampire, Battletech, Magic, Car Wars, Axis and Allies, Diplomacy, Warhammer 40K, L5R* CCG, and other games. Contact: Northeast Wars, 152 Church St, Burlington, VT 05401. Email: QstaffEPC@aol.com.

Our Con

April 23–25 **MA**

Campus, UMass, Amherst MA. Events: AD&D, *Palladium*, Warhammer, Car Wars, Vampire LARP, Shadowrun, Champions*, In Nomine*, Playtests of *Terminus: the Wild West RPG** and *IT**, con suite, movies, food zombies, and other activities. Contact: OurCon, RSO 178-416, UMass, Amherst, MA 01003. E-mail: ourcon@hotmail.com.
Web: www.umass.edu/rso/gameclub/ourcon.

Orion 1999

April 23–25 *

Days Inn, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. AD&D, *Advanced Civilization, Age of Renaissance, Axis and Allies, B5* CCG, *Bloodbowl, Cyberpunk: 2020*, Deadlands*, GURPS Fantasy*, Heavy Gear*, Storyline L5R* TCG tournament, *Magic* TCG, *Star Fleet Battles, Star Wars* CCG, *Vampire*, six RPGA LIVING CITY scenarios, *Amber Throne War*, Silent Death** demos, and other tournaments.
Email: orion@ aracnet.net.

OpCon

April 24 **IL**

Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park, IL. Guests: Mary Francis Zambreno and Susan Van Camp. Website: http://oprfhs.org/activ/scifi/opcon.

MAY

Fantasy Fair Nine

May 9 ✿

The Cresset Exhibition, Bretton, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom. Events: dealer's room, demos, and fantasy dress competition. Contact: The Hallards, Eaton Socon, St. Neots, Cambridgeshire, U.K., PE19 3QW.

Patriot Games 99

May 20–23 **VA**

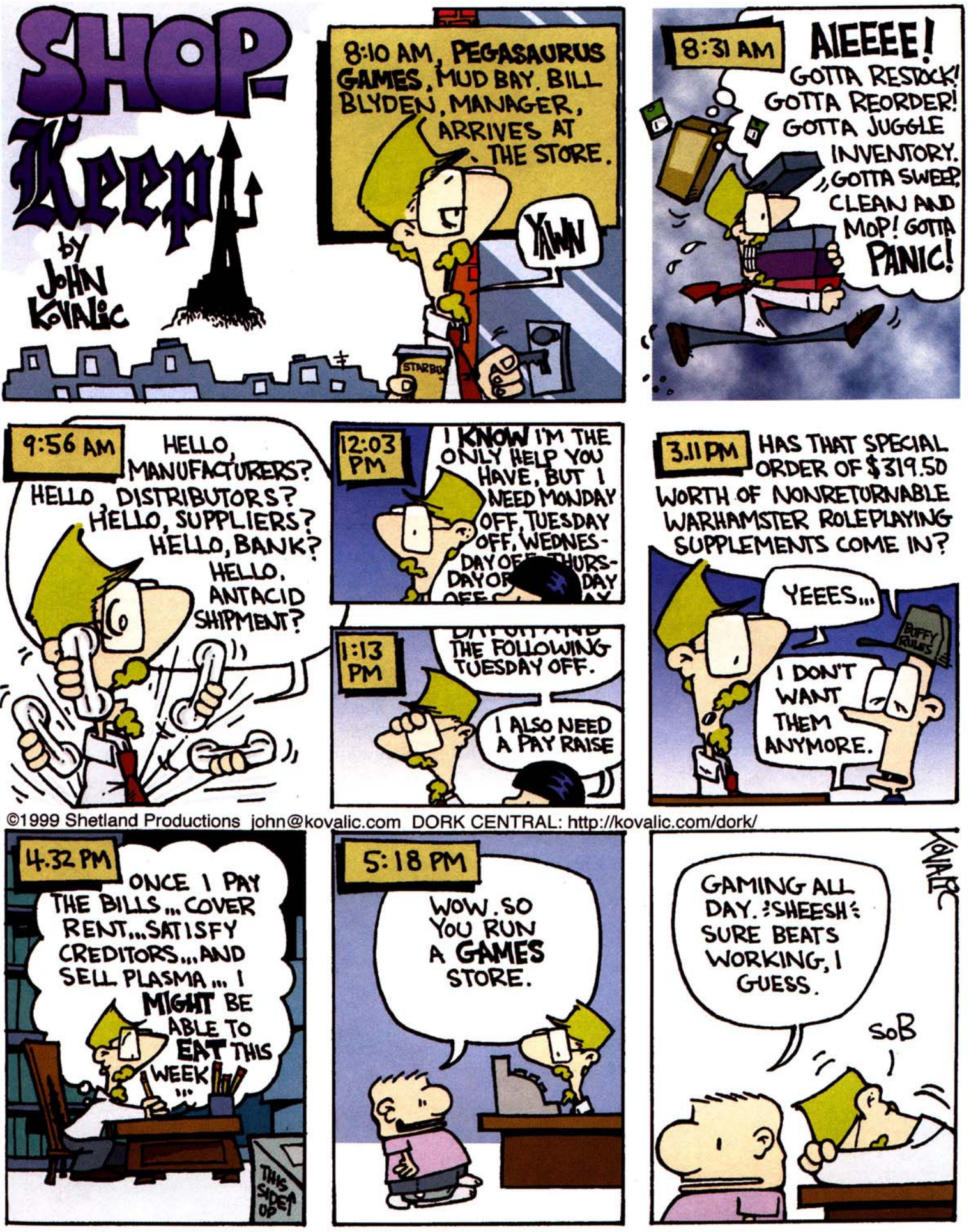
Holiday Inn Centra, Richmond, VA. Events: Caprizzio in concert and gaming events. Contact: Virginia Roleplayer's Association, P.O. Box 8865, Richmond, VA, 23225. E-mail: VRPAques@aol.com. Web: members.home.net:80/village6/page3.html.

JUNE

Milwaukee Summer Revel III

June 10–13 **WI**

The Best Western Inn, Milwaukee, WI. Events: First-run RPGA Network tournaments, including LIVING CITY, LIVING DEATH™, LIVING JUNGLE™, Virtual Seattle, AD&D, BOOT HILL®, *Call of Cthulhu**, *Settlers of Catan**, *KingMaker**, *Axis & Allies**, *Diplomacy*, and more. Registration: $30 prereg until Jan. 15, $35 thereafter. Contact: Bruce Rabe, P.O. Box 779, New Munster, WI 53152. Website: www.rli.netnet/~melka/msr/index.htm.


SHOP-Keep
by JOHN KOVALIC
8:10 AM, PEGASAURUS GAMES, MUD BAY. BILL BLYDEN, MANAGER, ARRIVES AT THE STORE.
YAWN
8:31 AM
AIEEEE! GOTTA RESTOCK! GOTTA REORDER! GOTTA JUGGLE INVENTORY. GOTTA SWEEP, CLEAN AND MOP! GOTTA PANIC!
9:56 AM
HELLO, MANUFACTURERS? HELLO, DISTRIBUTORS? HELLO, SUPPLIERS? HELLO, BANK? HELLO, ANTACID SHIPMENT?
12:03 PM
I KNOW I'M THE ONLY HELP YOU HAVE, BUT I NEED MONDAY OFF, TUESDAY OFF, WEDNESDAY OFF, THURSDAY OFF
1:13 PM
THE FOLLOWING TUESDAY OFF.
I ALSO NEED A PAY RAISE
3:11 PM
HAS THAT SPECIAL ORDER OF $319.50 WORTH OF NONRETURNABLE WARHAMSTER ROLEPLAYING SUPPLEMENTS COME IN?
YEEES...
BUFFY RULES
I DON'T WANT THEM ANYMORE.
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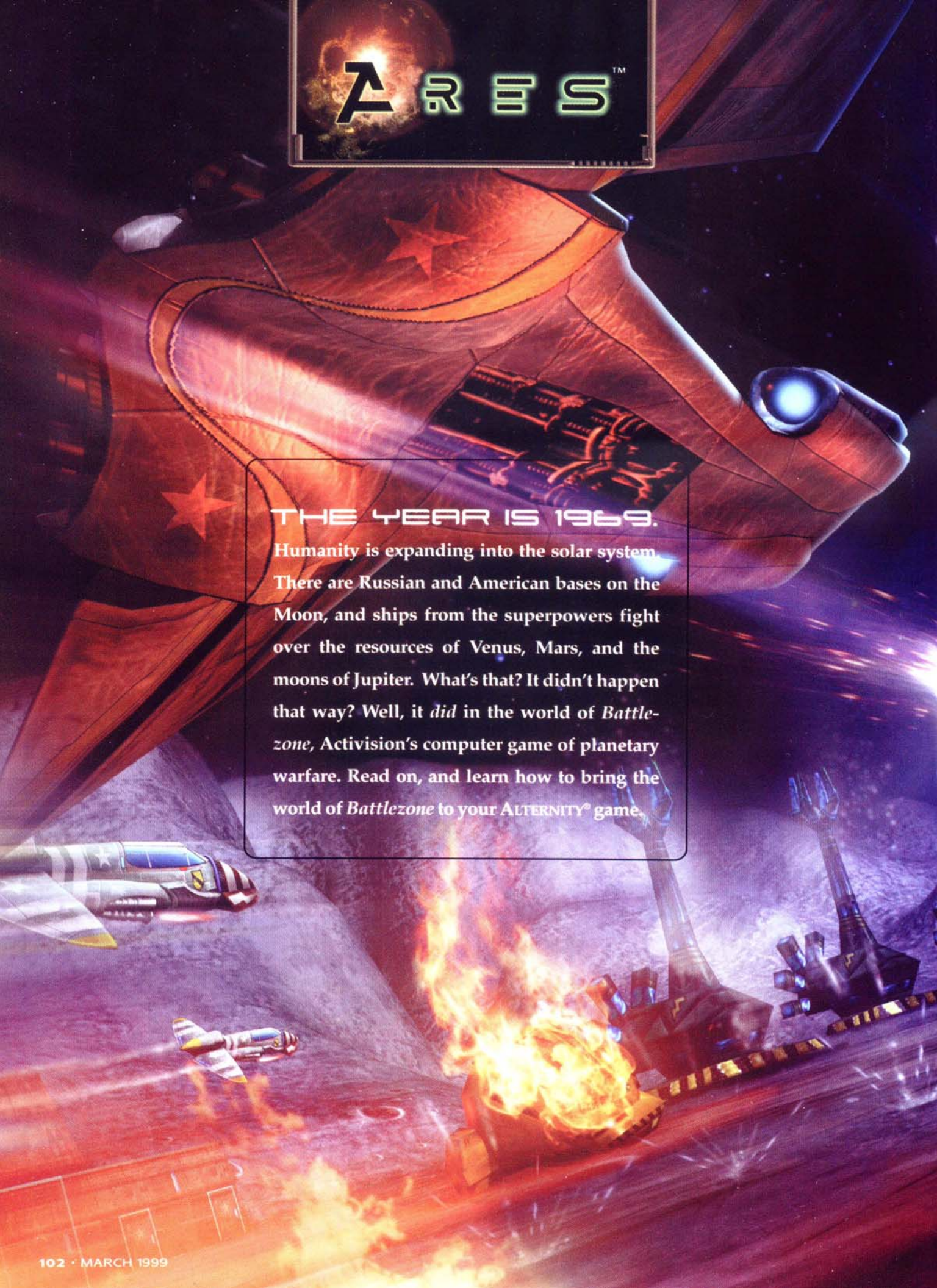
4:32 PM
ONCE I PAY THE BILLS... COVER RENT... SATISFY CREDITORS... AND SELL PLASMA... I MIGHT BE ABLE TO EAT THIS WEEK...
THIS SIDE UP
5:18 PM
WOW. SO YOU RUN A GAMES STORE.
KOVALIC
GAMING ALL DAY. SHEESH. SURE BEATS WORKING, I GUESS.
SoB



THE YEAR IS 1969.

Humanity is expanding into the solar system. There are Russian and American bases on the Moon, and ships from the superpowers fight over the resources of Venus, Mars, and the moons of Jupiter. What's that? It didn't happen that way? Well, it *did* in the world of *Battlezone*, Activision's computer game of planetary warfare. Read on, and learn how to bring the world of *Battlezone* to your ALTERNITY® game.

BATTLE ZONE

BY

STEPHEN KENSON

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The NSDF defends its moonbases jealously.

HISTORY

The world of *Battlezone* was the same as our own until June 15, 1952, when a shower of meteors fell to Earth. These space-rocks contained something that would change the history of the world forever.

THE BERING SHOWER

The meteor shower landed in the Bering Strait between Alaska and Siberia. Radar-tracking systems had detected the shower, and there was no real danger from the meteors. Still. it was unusual for such a large number of meteors to survive entry into the Earth's atmosphere without burning up. Both the Americans and the Soviets dispatched scientists to recover and study some of the meteorites. When they did, they made a startling discovery.

The meteorites that survived re-entry were composed largely of an unknown material. It was similar to metal but possessed properties that were practically biological. Both the United States and the Soviet Union scrambled to gather as much of the bio-metal as possible. In short order, each side had claimed roughly half the samples from the Bering meteor shower.

The American government set up a secret lab in Nevada to study the bio-metal. For several years, scientists experimented with the material, discovering its amazing properties. The bio-metal appeared to have a "memory," allowing it to return to its normal shape after being deformed or even damaged. The engineering possibilities of the material were staggering. Perhaps even greater was the scientists' discovery that the bio-metal was a manufactured material of extraterrestrial origin. They estimated that the fragments that hit Earth came from a point at least 100 trillion miles away and that the fragments had been part of a much larger structure. This suggested that bio-metal fragments might have fallen on nearly every other planet in the solar system. Soviet scientists quickly reached the same conclusion, and the race to control the incredible new resource was on.

THE NATIONAL SPACE DEFENSE FORCE

In July of 1958, President Eisenhower established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). At the same time, the President secretly established the National Space Defense Force (NSDF), under the command of General George Collins. The NSDF's mission was to recruit the best engineers, pilots, and soldiers to venture into space looking for other deposits of bio-metal and claim them for the United States. The NSDF went into action immediately. Funded through the National Security Agency, the NSDF was answerable to no one, not even the President. Arrangements were made for perpetuating the organization and maintaining its secrecy.

Using the small stockpile of bio-metal controlled by the United States, the NSDF began to design, build, and test rockets to carry its personnel out into space. Before the Apollo missions officially sent U.S. astronauts to the Moon, the NSDF had rockets capable of reaching Venus and Mars, and it was already establishing a base on the dark side of the Moon, where they found additional deposits of bio-metal—and the first signs of a new threat.

THE COSMO COLONIST ARMY

The Americans were not the only ones venturing out into space looking for bio-metal. The Soviet Union had established the Cosmo Colonist Army (CCA), and they had their own spaceships able to reach the Moon and other planets. When Soviet and American forces met on the dark side of the Moon in 1961, the Cold War became a secret interplanetary conflict as both sides struggled for control of the bio-metal. Bio-metal vehicles and weapons were used in the conflict—a war unknown to the general populace of Earth.

The year is now 1969. Both the NSDF and the CCA have ships capable of reaching the outer planets of the Solar System. The secret war continues over control of bio-metal deposits and the advanced technology they represent. The goal is nothing less than total control of the solar system and Earth itself. Looming in the background is the question scientists first posed when they studied the bio-metal: If it was constructed, who made it? And is anyone else likely to come looking for it?

TECHNOLOGY

Although the rest of Earth exists at Progress Level 5, bio-metal has allowed the NSDF and the CCA to advance to Progress Level 6 in many areas, including vehicles, space exploration, engineering, and weapons technology. Both sides have ships capable of interplanetary travel, equivalent to STG shuttles from the ALTERNITY game (*Player's Handbook*, page 196). They also have armored ground and aerospace vehicles.

Some technology remains at Progress Level 5, just edging into 6. Fission technology is still in regular use, and fusion technology hasn't been mastered yet. Other energy sources, like solar and geothermal power, are in common use by both sides, particularly since bio-metal solar satellites and geothermal-taps are much more efficient. Even the advanced ships possessed by the NSDF and the CCA take considerable time to reach other planets, as long as months for the outer planets. Communication is also limited by the speed of light, so comm signals take hours to reach Earth or the Moon from Titan.

POLITICS

On Earth, the political situation is much like it was in the real world in 1969. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union is in full swing. The American government opposes the expansion of communism in other nations, particularly in South and Central America. The Soviet Union exerts influence over its satellite states and much of Eastern Europe. Both superpowers control massive arsenals of nuclear weapons, poised to annihilate each other.

Behind the scenes, the Cold War grows very hot indeed. Technically, the United States and the Soviet Union are already at war, a war in space. Military units from both sides clash regularly on the Moon and the other planets in the solar system. For the time being, at least, both sides have agreed to keep Earth as "neutral ground" in the conflict. Although either the Americans or the Soviets could use their bio-metal vehicles and ships to launch an all-out attack on the other, neither side is willing to risk the possibility of a full-scale war on Earth, which would almost certainly involve the use of nuclear weapons. The conflict on Earth remains secondary to the conflict raging out in space.

So far, both the Soviets and the Americans have kept the existence of their space programs and the bio-metal a secret. The Soviets are quite familiar with keeping state secrets, and anyone unwise enough to question the statements of the Kremlin receives a visit from the KGB and is usually never seen again. The Americans have a slightly more difficult time keeping the activities of the NSDF secret. NASA, of course, is under orders from the NSA to keep some information Top Secret, and the government does the same with other observatories and scientists who might find out about the NSDF's activities. Many of these people are recruited to work with the NSDF, and most of them jump at the opportunity.

Out on the fringe of society, there are those who have some inkling of what's going on. Most are conspiracy theorists or UFO nuts who think that NSDF operations are actually indications of alien life on other planets in the solar system, or alien ships visiting Earth. Even a few small samples of bio-metal have been stolen, considered evidence of human contact with extraterrestrials. NSDF agents have always recovered any stolen materials and discredited those who might expose them. Most of the United States government is largely unaware of even the existence of the NSDF.

THE SOLAR SYSTEM

The ships controlled by the NSDF and the CCA can reach the outer planets of Earth's solar system. Of primary interest to both organizations are worlds where bio-metal debris may have landed relatively intact. These are the worlds each side fights to control so it can salvage the precious material and use it to strengthen its own position.

For this reason, the outer planets are of little interest to either party. With their thick, poisonous atmospheres and tremendous surface pressure, planets like Uranus, Neptune, and Saturn are unexplorable, even with bio-metal vehicles. Any debris that might have hit them is lost. However, the larger moons of Jupiter and Saturn have proven to contain some bio-metal debris, making them sites of conflict. Likewise, the inner planets of Mars and Venus are sites of bio-metal debris, as is Luna, Earth's moon.

LUNA

Earth's moon is the staging point for operations deeper into the solar system, the command-center for the war between the NSDF and the CCA. It is also a battlezone of its own, with large deposits of bio-metal that fell on the

BATTLEZONE & THE STAR*DRIVE™ SETTING

With a little work, you can adapt the *Battlezone* setting described in this article to fit in with the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting. For example, the source of the bio-metal could have come from a fraal city-ship that suffered a gravity drive failure and was torn apart, scattering debris across the solar system. The fraal have been debating what to do about this latest development. The possession of more advanced building materials has permitted humans to move out into the solar system much faster than the fraal anticipated. Do they reveal themselves now, while the humans are locked in a war with each other, and hope it brings peace? Or do they avoid all contact with the warlike species? The heroes could be the humans who make first contact with the fraal, adding a whole new dimension to the conflict and possibly leading into the early years of the STAR*DRIVE setting.

The *Battlezone* setting could take place in a solar system other than Earth's and involve an alien species rather than humanity. The destruction of an advanced vessel, perhaps during one of the Galactic Wars, showered an inhabited solar system with debris. This wreckage allowed a PL 5 civilization to quickly advance to PL 6 and begin expanding into space, where they fight over the remains of the debris on other planets. A Concord vessel sent to investigate the fate of the first ship could discover this civilization and decide whether to make contact. The aliens are hungry for more advanced technology, and each side wants to ally with the newcomers against its enemy.

Lastly, the *Battlezone* setting could be a parallel or alternate universe. Heroes from the STAR*DRIVE setting could end up there through a drive-space accident or some form of alien time- or dimensional-travel. Perhaps the source of the bio-metal is a time-traveling starship from the future that was destroyed when it arrived in Earth's solar system, altering history. If so, how will the heroes restore the timeline to normal?

Soviet forces on Titan present an obstacle for NSDF exploration.

Soviet Fighter

dark side of the lunar surface during the 1952 meteor shower. With no atmosphere to burn up the fragments, Luna has yielded a rich supply of bio-metal, and fighting over the material has been fierce.

Both the Americans and the Soviets reached Luna around the same time, and both have established bases there in the years since their arrival. The NSDF has three permanent Lunar bases: Eagle's Nest 1 on the far side, the solar-power collector near the north pole, and Kennedy Base on the near side. A fourth, Johnson Base, is under construction near the south pole to tap possible underground water resources. The Soviets have a mining base on the far side named Moon Station One, and a near side base called Moon Station Two.

American Tank

The majority of activity on the moon happens on the far side, out of view from instruments on Earth. The existence of the near-side moon bases will not remain secret forever. Already, some civilian astronomers have discovered them and been silenced by one of the organizations. Sooner or later, the truth about the bases will emerge. The NSDF is considering revealing the existence of Kennedy Base to the public, keeping the other lunar bases secret. Some in the organization feel that the existence of the base might boost American morale, much as the lunar landing did. Others feel it compromises the Defense Force's security.

Skirmishes and conflicts still take place on the far side of the moon. Reclamation units, protected by ground vehicles and aerospace units, foray out across the lunar surface, picking up fragments of bio-metal for processing. While large amounts of material have been collected on both sides, tons of bio-metal remain ungathered. Most of the bio-metal is processed by units on Luna itself and used to construct new vehicles and ships.

The NSDF considers Eagle's Nest 1 its headquarters. The security of the organization is too sensitive to entrust to any earthly headquarters, so operations were moved to Luna as soon as possible. All documentation and records of the Defense Force are kept at Eagle's Nest 1; none of them are ever brought to Earth, where security could be compromised. Likewise, the training of NSDF recruits takes place at the moonbase, rather than a location on Earth. This makes spying on NSDF operations considerably more difficult.

The Soviets, on the other hand, still maintain much of the administration and training of the CCA on Earth. They have a considerably easier time maintaining security, although some American spies have managed to infiltrate CCA facilities.

MARS

The red planet has been the site of many conflicts between the NSDF and the CCA. Like the Moon, Mars has several large deposits of bio-metal debris, buried beneath the red sands and hidden in the deep canyons and valleys. The thin atmosphere allowed most of the fragments to land intact. Vehicles fight it out in the lowlands, and aerospace fighters zip through the massive canyons in daring aerial dogfights. All the while recyclers and robot gatherers wander along, picking up as much debris as possible for processing.

The NSDF operates from Ares Base on Mars, hidden away in a deep canyon. The CCA's Mars Station One is located closer to one of the larger bio-metal deposits, but it is nearly exhausted. Each side is scrambling to locate concentrations of the alien metal before the other does, leading to many skirmishes and conflicts at potential sites.

In addition to the ongoing military operation, scientists are studying the Martian surface and investigating the possibility that life once existed on Mars. They have proposed a theory that the alien race responsible for the creation of the bio-metal might have colonized Mars once, or had some sort of base there. So far, there is no evidence to support this theory, but

BATTLEZONES

	Venus	Luna	Mars	Europa	Io	Titan
Primary	Sol	Earth	Sol	Jupiter	Jupiter	Saturn
Planetary Class	Class 3	Class 4	Class 3	Class 4	Class 4	Class 3
Gravity	G1 (0.907)	G1 (0.16)	G1 (0.377)	G1 (0.135)	G1 (0.183)	G1 (0.38)
Radiation	R2	R3	R2	R2	R2	R1
Atmosphere	A4	A0	A1	A0	A0	A1
Pressure	P5 (92)	P0 (0)	P1 (0.007)	P0 (0)	P0 (0)	P3 (1.5)
Heat	H4 (460)	H1 (–153)	H2 (–23)	H1 (–153)	H1 (–143)	H1 (–180)
Orbital Distance	0.7 AU	1.0 AU	1.5 AU	5.2 AU	5.2 AU	9.5 AU
Diameter	12,130 km	3,476 km	6,794 km	3,138 km	3,630 km	5,150 km
Year (Earth days)	224.7 days	365 days	686.9 days	11.8 years	11.8 years	29.5 years
Day (standard hours)	243 days	27 days	24.6 hours	3.5 days	1.7 days	15.9 days
Axial Tilt	177.33°	—	25.19°	—	—	—
# Satellites	None	None	2	None	None	None

research continues. Scientists are also exploring possibilities for terraforming Mars and establishing permanent colonies beyond the scope of the military bases. Initial reports on this project have been promising, although neither side wants to establish a colony in the middle of a battlezone.

VENUS

NSDF troops refer to Venus as "Planet Hell," and assignment to Ishtar Command is considered a punishment by most. The surface conditions of Venus are indeed hellish: temperatures over 400 degrees Celsius and a corrosive atmosphere with a pressure nearly a hundred times that of Earth's. Even the most advanced environment suits have trouble coping with the conditions on the surface, as do most combat vehicles. Still, since the discovery of small bio-metal deposits on the surface of the planet by unmanned probes, both the NSDF and the CCA have sent troops to Venus.

Venus is the smallest battlezone in terms of personnel and resources. It also appears to have the least amount of bio-metal, either because little fell to the surface or the corrosive effect of the atmosphere destroyed the debris that did hit the surface. The NSDF and the CCA each maintain small bases on the planet, protected by bio-metal support structures and advanced life support systems. Both bases use complex systems of attractors—known as "lightning towers"—to tap into the constant electrical activity in Venus' atmosphere for additional power.

Troops and equipment are rotated off Venus on a regular basis, since the conditions are destructive to both morale and technology. Soldiers who survive working on Venus are often quite proud of it, since the combat conditions are among the toughest around. For some veterans in both services, "surviving the goddess' fury" is a badge of honor.

EUROPA

The surface of Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, is a nearly featureless expanse of water-ice pitted by craters. The moon has no atmosphere to speak of, but the presence of so much water makes it attractive. Additionally, Europa's icy surface conceals bio-metal debris in some of its craters and crevasses. It is a fairly easy matter to collect the debris once it is found, provided that the other side doesn't make an issue over it. Aerospace support is important on Europa, since combat on the icy surface can prove difficult at times.

Scientists in the process of studying the moon have discovered that Europa is the only other planetary body in the solar system besides Earth to have liquid water, hidden deep beneath the surface ice and warmed by the moon's core. The tantalizing prospect that this water may contain some form of life has led to expeditions to obtain samples. However, the first attempt at a core-drilling by the NSDF resulted in a CCA attack. The Soviets assumed the NSDF was drilling for a source of bio-metal buried beneath the ice. For the time being, further investigations of Europa's sub-surface water are on hold.

American Razor

IO

As lifeless and frozen as Europa, Io presents an additional problem for surface operations. The Jovian moon is dotted with numerous volcanoes that spew molten sulfur from the moon's core, shooting hundreds of meters up from the surface. The sulfur cools and falls back to the surface of the planet like snow, constantly reshaping Io's landscape. Facilities on the moon use complex drainage systems and protective barriers to keep from being buried by the sulfur "snowfall." The soft surface cover also makes looking for bio-metal deposits difficult at best. Still, the

Soviet Tank

BATTLEZONE VEHICLES

Vehicle	Skill	Drv	Acc	Cruise	Max	Type	Dur	Armor
Scout	Air	+2	300	1500	4000	O	15/15/8	Light
Tank	Air	—	100	1000	3000	A	25/25/12	Heavy
Rocket Tank	Air	—	100	1000	3000	A	25/25/12	Medium
Turret	Land	—	40	100	130	O	8/8/4	Light
Light Tank	Air	—	80	1000	3000	G	25/25/12	Medium
Bomber	Air	–1	100	700	3000	G	20/20/10	Light
Transport	Land	–1	50	500	1000	G	18/18/9	Heavy
Howitzer	Land	–2	50	500	1000	G	20/20/10	Medium
Walker	Land	+1	50	100	250	A	22/22/11	Heavy
Minelayer	Air	—	100	400	800	O	18/18/9	Medium
Scavenger	—	—	100	500	1000	G	15/15/8	Medium
Recycler	—	—	100	500	1000	A	30/30/15	Heavy
Armory	—	—	100	500	1000	G	25/25/12	Heavy

All vehicles are available only to the NSDF and the CCA, so they have no Availability or Cost.

Soviet Rocket Tank

evidence of such deposits keeps both sides looking.

Small bases exist on Io, each near one of the moon's poles, since the tidal effects of Jupiter's massive gravitational pull often cause Io's equator to expand and contract by as much as 100 meters. This frequent geological activity leads to ground quakes and instability. Of course, the bio-metal deposits seem most prevalent nearest the equator. Skirmishes and expeditions are often forced to break off due to a quake or eruption.

Soviet Light Tank

TITAN

The farthest outpost of humanity in the solar system is Titan, one of Saturn's moons. An NSDF expeditionary force recently landed on Titan, remaining in semi-regular contact with NSDF command on Luna. The transmission delay from Titan is several hours, so communication is sporadic.

In addition to the slim possibility of bio-metal deposits, Titan presents a great scientific opportunity. Much of the expeditionary force is composed of scientists who are studying the surface and composition of Titan with the possibility of terraforming in mind. Titan has an atmosphere made up largely of nitrogen. It is not unlike conditions on Earth before the development of life. Titan also has the hydrocarbon-rich elements that are the building blocks of amino acids, the first development of life on Earth. If the oxygen currently trapped in water-ice on the moon's surface could be released, it would be the first step toward giving Titan a breathable atmosphere. There is also the tantalizing possibility of life already existing somewhere on Titan, although there is no evidence of that so far.

The NSDF is aware that the Soviets are also mounting an expedition to Titan. A CCA ship is already on the way and will arrive in about a month. The expeditionary force is being encouraged to complete their initial surveys as quickly as possible. If they do get involved in a conflict with the Soviets, they're basically on their own.

VEHICLES

Both the Americans and the Soviets used bio-metal to build vehicles and ships at PL 6. These vehicles are used in the secret war between the two nations. All vehicles use bio-metal armor, which is roughly equivalent to polymeric alloy armor (ALTERNITY *Gamemaster's Guide*, page 132). Weapons are described in the Vehicle Weapons section. The names in parenthesis following the vehicle type are the nicknames for NSDF and CCA versions of each vehicle, sometimes the same name.

Scout (Razor/Flanker): An aerospace light fighter plane, equipped with powerful thrusters. It can turn on a dime and has VTOL capabilities. It is only lightly armed with two miniguns, intended primarily for reconnaissance.

Main Tank (Grizzly/Czar): A mainstay of NSDF and CCA forces. It has a wide range of weapons and a powerful thruster array. The main tank's heavier armor slows it somewhat, but it's still quite agile on the battlefield. The tank is armed with an AT-Stabber, a minigun, and a mortar.

Rocket Tank (Wolverine/Tusker): The rocket tank is similar to the main tank, but carries lighter armor and a different array of weapons. The rocket tank is armed with missiles and proximity mines.

Turret (Badger): The turret is a small defensive unit, deployed to protect the perimeter of a base. There it deploys its STAB hooks (Stabilized Terrain-Adapting Base) to secure it to the ground and

BATTLEZONE WEAPONS

Weapon	Acc	Range	Type	Damage	Ac/Rd	Md	Clip	Dur
187 SMG	0	150/600/1500	HI (p)/G	2d4+1w/3d4w/d6m	4	A	15	3
AT-Stabber	0	200/800/4000	HI (p)/G	d8w/d6+1m/d6+3m	1	F	10	3
Blast Cannon	–1	250/750/2500	En (e)/G	d6+2w/d8+2w/d4+1m	2	F	20	3
MAG	0	75/150/250	En (e)/G	d6w/d6+2w/d6m	1	F	15	3
Flash Cannon	+1	300/800/3000	En (e)/G	d6+2w/d8w/d6m	1	F	12	4
TAG Cannon	+1	500/1500/5000	HI (g)/G	d6+2w/d6+4w/d4+1m	1	F	10	3
AT-Super Stabber	0	200/800/4000	HI (p)/A	d8w/d6+1m/d6+3m	1	F	8	5
Mortars	–1	300/700/3000	HI (p)/A	d6+1w/d6+2w/d4+1m	1	F	8	4
Missiles	–1	500/1500/5000	HI (g)/G	d8s/d8+1w/d6m	1	F	6	2
Rocket Bombs	–2	500/1500/5000	HI (p)/A	d8s/d8+1w/d6m	1	F	6	2
Mines	0	0	HI (p)/G	d6+2s/d8w/d4+1m	1	F	8	3
Solar Flare	0	0	—	—	1	F	8	3

All weapons are available only to the NSDF and the CCA, so they have no Availability or Cost.

provide a stable firing platform. It is most useful along a canyon or pass where it has a full arc of fire and cannot be outflanked by attackers. The turret is armed with a standard minigun.

Light Tank (Bobcat/Stoli): A less powerful, older version of the main tank. The light tank served as the NSDF's main tank during the establishment of the bases on Luna, but has since been replaced by a more advanced model. Still, the light tank remains a low-cost, reliable unit. It is armed with an AT-Stabber, missiles, and a solar flare.

Bomber (Thunderbolt/Grendel): The bomber is a fast-strike cruiser. It carries powerful rocket bombs for strafing attacks against enemy ground targets. The bomber is designed not for extended battles but for quick strike-and-retreat missions.

Transport (Tracker): The Tracker is a heavily armored personnel carrier for deploying ground troops. It is escorted by other vehicles, since it carries no weapons of its own.

Howitzer (Longbow): A mobile howitzer that fires mortar shells.

Walker (Sasquatch/Golem): The walker is one of the prime weapons of both forces. This vehicle appears roughly humanoid, with weapon-mounts for two AT-stabbers and a MAG gun or Flash Cannon.

Minelayer (Unabomber): This vehicle is a defensive vehicle with one purpose: it drops an array of smart-mines that do not detonate in proximity to friendly vehicles.

Reclamation Unit (Scavenger): Scavengers are automated vacuum cleaners that roam the battlefield, gathering scrap from damaged vehicles and bio-metal deposits.

Mobile Bio-Metal Fabricator (Recycler): The Recycler is a mobile, automated construction factory, capable of rapidly turning out any of the vehicles programmed into its memory systems using its internal supply of materials and those gathered by Scavenger units. Recyclers provide new vehicles to maintain bases when supplies may take weeks or months to reach them. They also allow planetary bases to put gathered bio-metal "to work" immediately.

Supply Launch (Armory): An Armory is similar to the Recycler but produces weapons, ammunition and spare parts. It also serves as a mobile satellite communications link for other vehicles.

VEHICLE WEAPONS

187 SMG (Standard Mini Gun): A rapid-fire, small-projectile machine gun.

AT-Stabber: Short for Anti-Tank Stabber. Fires a high-speed shell.

Blast Cannon: Fires a short but powerful laser burst.

MAG (Magnetic Acceleration Gun): A charging magnetic acceleration gun that fires bursts of magnetic energy.

Flash Cannon: The flash cannon fires a concentrated beam of microwaves at its target.

Automated Targeting Gun (TAG Cannon): The TAG cannon fires off homing ordinance into the skin of its target,

Soviet Scavenger

Soviet Walker

American Unabomber

Military, Intrigue, and Exploration are only three possible campaign models.

then fires a salvo of guided missiles that lock on to the homing signal.

AT-Super Stabber: Fires an advanced, high-explosive stabber round.

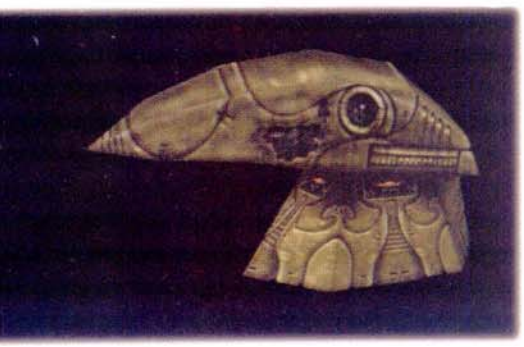
Mortars: Mortars are indirect-fire munitions designed to explode on impact.

Missiles: Guided air-to-air missiles armed with explosive warheads.

Rocket Bombs: Powerful, unguided missiles with more explosives.

Proximity Mines: Mines do not explode until they detect an enemy vehicle.

Solar Flare: A specially modified mine that gives off a plume of superheated gas that attracts heat-seeking missiles.



What surprises await interplanetary explorers?

CAMPAIGN MODELS

The *Battlezone* setting presents several different possibilities for ALTERNITY campaigns. The three most compatible campaign models are Military, Intrigue, and Exploration.

MILITARY

The military model is the most obvious type of *Battlezone* campaign. The heroes are soldiers serving the NSDF or the CCA in the secret war over control of the bio-metal resources of the solar system. Their missions take them to different planets and battlezones, where they fight the enemy to gather the largest amount of bio-metal debris.

Combat Spec heroes are clearly the best suited for this campaign model, but there is also a strong need for Tech Ops as pilots, technicians, engineers, and scientists, along with Free Agent scouts. Diplomats have less of a role in a military campaign, but a Diplomat with a secondary profession of Combat Spec or Tech Op could still prove useful, especially if a battle comes down to a delicate negotiation between the rival parties.

INTRIGUE

The *Battlezone* setting offers many possibilities for intrigue and espionage. The Cold War on Earth is in full swing, with all the spying and action between organizations like the CIA and KGB that existed in real history. On top of that are the secret activities of the NSDF and CCA. The Americans and Soviets possess secret technologies far in advance of the other nations on Earth. Spies work to infiltrate the other nation's organizations to gather sensitive information. Agents from other nations may also spy on the Americans and Soviets to discover the truth about their secret space program. One interesting campaign premise is to start the heroes with no knowledge of the secret space war and allow them to uncover the truth through their investigations. One of the two factions must recruit the heroes or kill them to protect their secrets.

Free Agent heroes shine in an intrigue campaign, but Diplomats are common as well, especially if they have Free Agent as a secondary profession. Combat Spec heroes can be elite commandos and special forces, while Tech Ops are specialists in surveillance equipment and electronics.

EXPLORATION

In addition to the battle for control of the bio-metal, the NSDF and the CCA are exploring the solar system. They already have bases established on distant planets, and many different scientific projects are underway. Heroes can explore the surface of the Moon, map the canyons of Mars, seek life under the ice of Europa, or join an expeditionary force and become the first humans to set foot on mysterious Titan. Explorers have to deal with the harsh and challenging environments of other worlds. They may also discover more than they expected. Perhaps the bio-metal is only part of the alien technology scattered across the solar system. Explorers might discover alien artifacts or evidence of life on other planets. They might also stumble into actual members of the race that created the bio-metal and initiate first contact with them.

Tech Ops are the natural profession for an exploration campaign. The skills of Free Agents may also come in useful. Combat Specs provide protection against military threats during the expedition, and Diplomat heroes can deal with appearances by the opposition, or with unexpected contact with an alien race.

Steve Kenson is a freelance author and longtime science-fiction fan. He fondly recalls learning how to play Space Invaders *and* BattleTech*. *Somehow he always ends up converting his video games into RPGs.*

Hear ye, hear ye!

Brave Adventurers Needed

The staff of *Dragon*® *Magazine* needs a party of 1st-level adventurers for a perilous quest! Six fledgling heroes are required; the winning characters will be used in AD&D® playtest sessions by the magazine staff and appear in a future issue of the magazine!

Rules For Designing Your 1st-level Character

Your character may be of any race and class allowed in the AD&D® core rules (*Player's Handbook* only). Your character should include ability scores, proficiencies, hit points, and equipment. Spellcasters should have spells; rogues should possess thieving skills. We'd also like you to provide a detailed description of the character as well as an interesting background. Feel free to include a sketch of the character, although drawings and graphics are strictly optional.

Each entry should be limited to **750 words**. Entries will be judged on character concept, detail, and rules consistency. All entries must be received by **April 30, 1999**.

The six winners will each receive a free one-year subscription to *Dragon Magazine* as well as an original black-and-white illustration of his or her character, rendered by a talented TSR artist. The winning entries will also appear in an upcoming issue of the magazine.

"Design a 1st-Level Character" Contest Rules

1. Entry: To enter, send your completed entry form including your name, address, phone number, the contest to which your submission applies, and your proposed Character Design Description ("Entry") to TSR, Inc. ("TSR") *Dragon Magazine* "Design a 1st-Level Character" Contest, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. No purchase required. You may submit as many entries as you wish, but only one Entry per submission. There is no advantage to submitting the same entry more than once. Entries may not exceed 750 words in length. If you are under 18, you must have your parent's permission to enter. Entries must be received before midnight (Pacific Time), April 30, 1999. Winners will be selected by a team of TSR judges based on the Entry's format, originality, and appropriateness. All decisions are final. The probability of winning is based exclusively on the quality of the Entries received.

2. Originality of Entry: All Entries must be in English. Entrant warrants that the Entry written above is the original and exclusive work of Entrant, and that Entrant has not assigned, transferred, licensed, or sold the right to use the Entry to any other party. Entrant agrees to indemnify TSR against good faith claims of copyright infringement based on TSR's use of the Entry, but such indemnification shall not apply if it can be shown that Entrant had no access to the allegedly infringed work.

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"Design a 1st-Level Character" Contest

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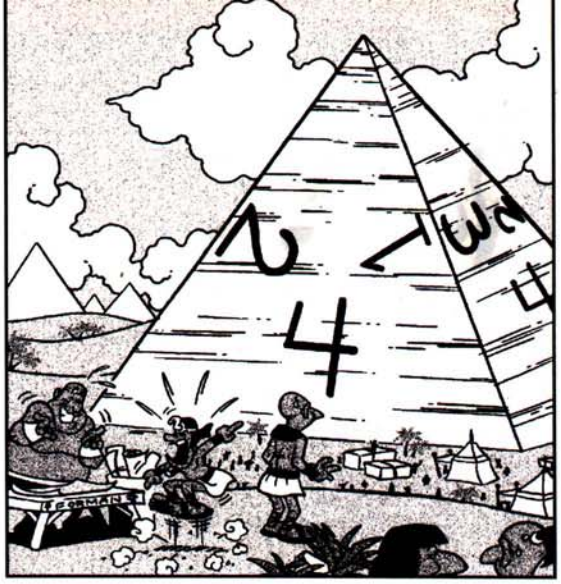
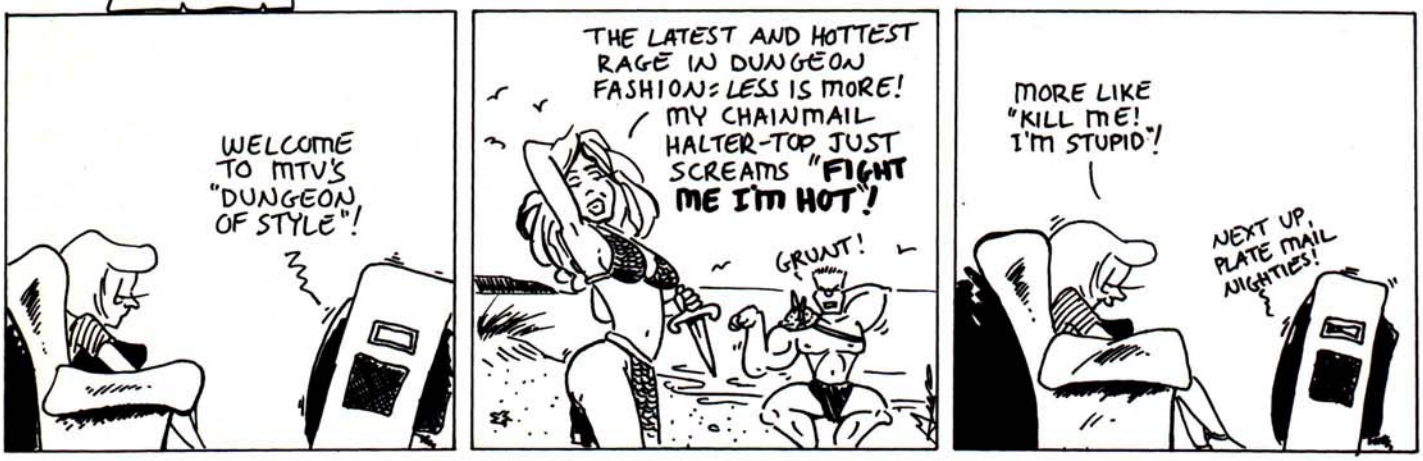
Dragon Mirth™



By Peter Delgado, Jr.

By Mathew Guss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THE LATEST AND HOTTEST RAGE IN DUNGEON FASHION: LESS IS MORE! MY CHAINMAIL HALTER-TOP JUST SCREAMS "FIGHT ME I'm HOT"!
GRUNT!
MORE LIKE "KILL ME! I'm STUPID"!
NEXT UP, PLATE MAIL NIGHTIES!

"..WE WERE JUST BEAT UP BY FAIRIES... ITS TIME TO ADMIT WE NEED MORE EXPERIENCE POINTS..."
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By Joe Pillsbury

The Unspeakable Oaf by John Kovalic

THE GOOD NEWS IS YOU'VE WON THE HAND OF THE PRINCESS AND HALF OF THE KINGDOM. THE BAD NEWS IS, ACCORDING TO THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT...
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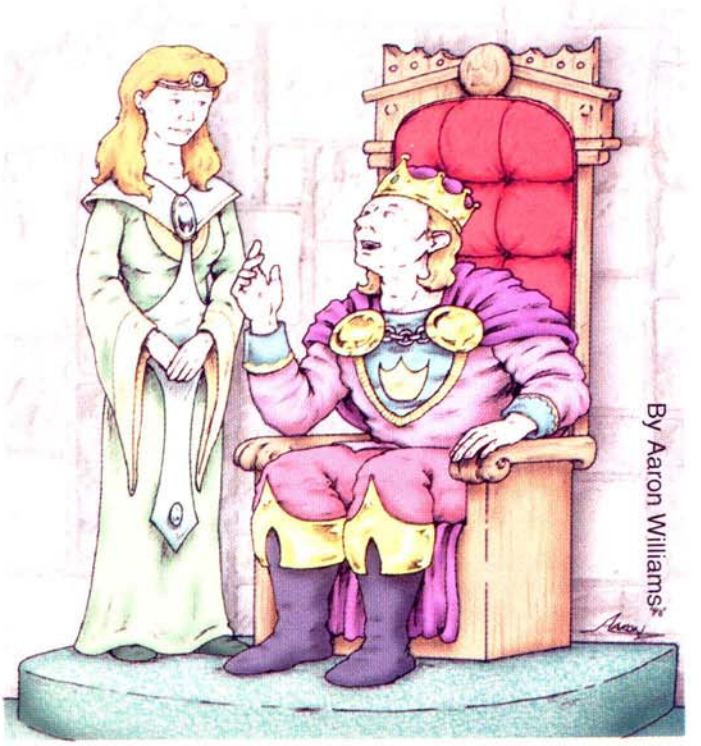


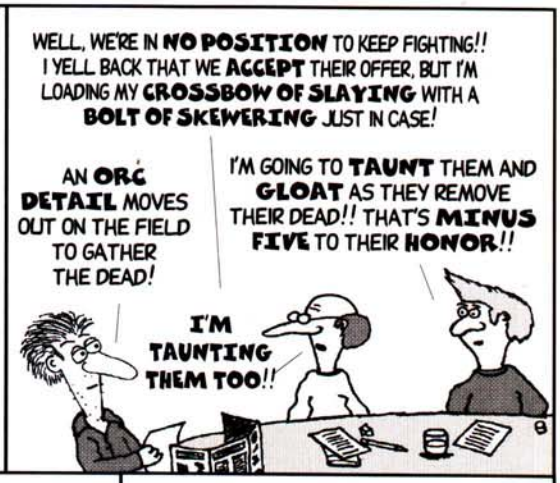
"Yes, my last name is still "Charming," but I'm the king formerly known as Prince."

"That does it! We're getting an evil cleric!"

Knights of the Dinner Table™

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN
STORY SUGGESTED BY TRISTAN EIFLER

OKAY, THE ORC SLAVERS YELL OUT ACROSS THE BATTLE FIELD, "LET US RECOVER OUR DEAD AND WOUNDED, AND WE WILL WITHDRAW FROM THE AREA!"
YOU'RE KIDDING! I'M DOWN TO 4 HIT-POINTS!! I THOUGHT I WAS A GONER!
YEAH, I'M DOWN TO 10 MYSELF!
ONLY 18 LEFT HERE!
SO I GUESS IT'S A DRAW, HUH? DAMN, I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THESE GUYS WOULDN'T BREAK! ORCS ARE USUALLY HIT-AND-RUN TACTICIANS!!

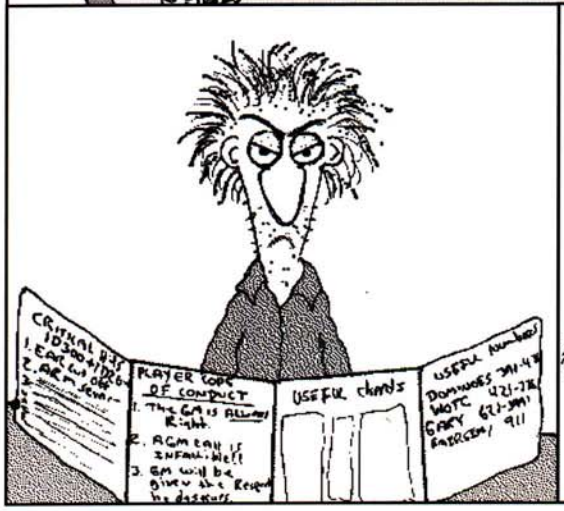

WELL, WE'RE IN NO POSITION TO KEEP FIGHTING!! I YELL BACK THAT WE ACCEPT THEIR OFFER, BUT I'M LOADING MY CROSSBOW OF SLAYING WITH A BOLT OF SKEWERING JUST IN CASE!
AN ORC DETAIL MOVES OUT ON THE FIELD TO GATHER THE DEAD!
I'M GOING TO TAUNT THEM AND GLOAT AS THEY REMOVE THEIR DEAD!! THAT'S MINUS FIVE TO THEIR HONOR!!
I'M TAUNTING THEM TOO!!

B.A., MY BARD CLIMBS UP ON THE PARAPET AND PASSIONATELY PLAYS THE FUNERAL SONG "ODE TO THE FALLEN BRAVE" ON MY BAGPIPES. HOPEFULLY, THE ORC LITTER-BEARERS WILL HEAR IT AND KNOW IT'S A TRIBUTE TO THEIR DEAD COMRADES!
HMMM... I'LL RULE THE ORCS HEAR THE SONG AND PAUSE TO LISTEN!!
WAA... WHAT?? YOU'RE PLAYING YOUR PIPES? FOR ORCS??
WHAT GIVES?
DAMN!! HER SONG WILL CANCEL OUT THE AFFECTS OF OUR TAUNTING AND GLOATING!!

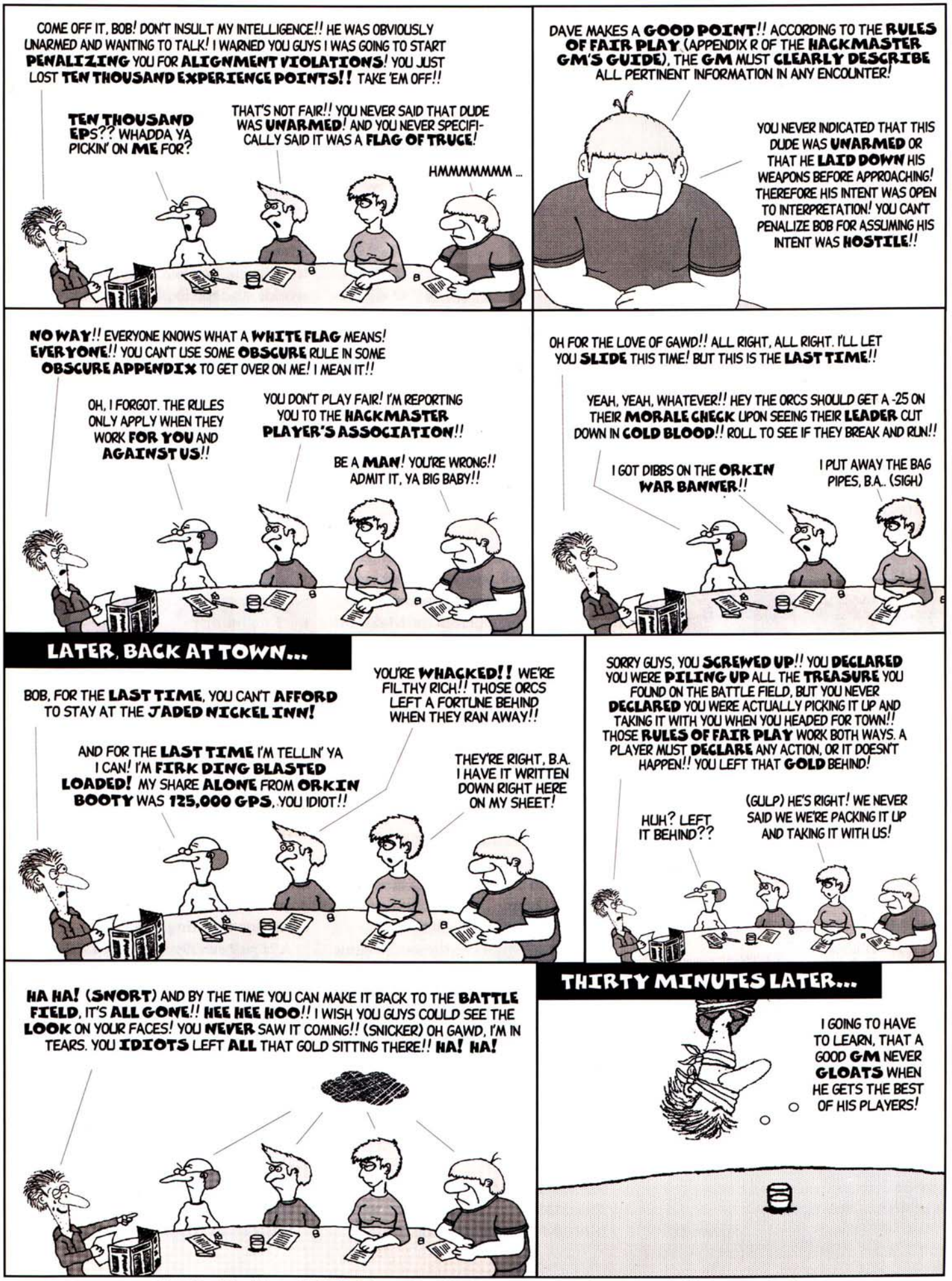
MY BARD IS A FURTHINGTON HIGHLANDER—OUR ENTIRE CULTURE IS BASED ON THE WAYS OF THE WARRIOR. IT IS OUR CUSTOM TO HONOR THOSE WHO FALL IN BATTLE, EVEN THOSE OF THE ENEMY!
I DON'T CARE! STOP WITH THE FREAKIN' PLAYING!! YOU'RE EMBARRASSING US!
YEAH!! THEY'RE ORCS, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

THE LITTER-BEARERS ARE VISIBLY WEEPING AS THEY MOVE ABOUT THE FIELD AND LOAD THE BODIES. SUDDENLY YOU SEE A FIGURE IN CEREMONIAL DRESS CLIMB OVER THE STONE WALL AND APPROACH—IT IS THE ORC CHIEFTAIN!!
THE CHIEFTAIN? YOU MEAN THE BIG GUY HIMSELF?? DAR-KANG??!!
NO WONDER THE ORCS WOULDN'T BREAK AND RUN!! A CHIEFTAIN GIVES THEM +10 TO MORALE!
WOW!!

HE IS WAVING A WHITE FLAG AS HE APPROACHES YOUR POSITION CAUTIOUSLY!!
I MOTION FOR THE OL' BOY TO APPROACH FURTHER!! THEN I WASTE HIM WITH MY CROSSBOW!!
GOOD JOB, BOB!!



WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, BOB? THE GUY WAS UNDER A FLAG OF TRUCE!!
I FELT THREATENED! AFTER ALL, HE WAS THE ORC CHIEFTAIN!!
WELL I DON'T THINK A LAWFUL GOOD CHARACTER WOULD JUST "WASTE" AN UNARMED CHARACTER DEMONSTRATING PEACEFUL INTENT!!
SORRY, MY DWARF IS COLOR BLIND!! LOOKED LIKE AN ORKIN WAR BANNER TO ME! THESE THINGS HAPPEN IN THE FOG OF WAR!!
HE WAS JUST AN ORC!
MURDERER!!


COME OFF IT, BOB! DON'T INSULT MY INTELLIGENCE!! HE WAS OBVIOUSLY UNARMED AND WANTING TO TALK! I WARNED YOU GUYS I WAS GOING TO START PENALIZING YOU FOR ALIGNMENT VIOLATIONS! YOU JUST LOST TEN THOUSAND EXPERIENCE POINTS!! TAKE 'EM OFF!!
TEN THOUSAND EPS?? WHADDA YA PICKIN' ON ME FOR?
THAT'S NOT FAIR!! YOU NEVER SAID THAT DUDE WAS UNARMED! AND YOU NEVER SPECIFICALLY SAID IT WAS A FLAG OF TRUCE!
HMMMMMMM ...
DAVE MAKES A GOOD POINT!! ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF FAIR PLAY (APPENDIX R OF THE HACKMASTER GM'S GUIDE), THE GM MUST CLEARLY DESCRIBE ALL PERTINENT INFORMATION IN ANY ENCOUNTER!
YOU NEVER INDICATED THAT THIS DUDE WAS UNARMED OR THAT HE LAID DOWN HIS WEAPONS BEFORE APPROACHING! THEREFORE HIS INTENT WAS OPEN TO INTERPRETATION! YOU CAN'T PENALIZE BOB FOR ASSUMING HIS INTENT WAS HOSTILE!!
NO WAY!! EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT A WHITE FLAG MEANS! EVERYONE!! YOU CAN'T USE SOME OBSCURE RULE IN SOME OBSCURE APPENDIX TO GET OVER ON ME! I MEAN IT!!
OH, I FORGOT. THE RULES ONLY APPLY WHEN THEY WORK FOR YOU AND AGAINST US!!
YOU DON'T PLAY FAIR! I'M REPORTING YOU TO THE HACKMASTER PLAYER'S ASSOCIATION!!
BE A MAN! YOU'RE WRONG!! ADMIT IT, YA BIG BABY!!
OH FOR THE LOVE OF GAWD!! ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT. I'LL LET YOU SLIDE THIS TIME! BUT THIS IS THE LAST TIME!!
YEAH, YEAH, WHATEVER!! HEY THE ORCS SHOULD GET A -25 ON THEIR MORALE CHECK UPON SEEING THEIR LEADER CUT DOWN IN COLD BLOOD!! ROLL TO SEE IF THEY BREAK AND RUN!!
I GOT DIBBS ON THE ORKIN WAR BANNER!!
I PUT AWAY THE BAG PIPES, B.A.. (SIGH)
LATER, BACK AT TOWN...
BOB, FOR THE LAST TIME, YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO STAY AT THE JADED NICKEL INN!
AND FOR THE LAST TIME I'M TELLIN' YA I CAN! I'M FIRK DING BLASTED LOADED! MY SHARE ALONE FROM ORKIN BOOTY WAS 125,000 GPS, YOU IDIOT!!
YOU'RE WHACKED!! WE'RE FILTHY RICH!! THOSE ORCS LEFT A FORTUNE BEHIND WHEN THEY RAN AWAY!!
THEY'RE RIGHT, B.A. I HAVE IT WRITTEN DOWN RIGHT HERE ON MY SHEET!
SORRY GUYS, YOU SCREWED UP!! YOU DECLARED YOU WERE PILING UP ALL THE TREASURE YOU FOUND ON THE BATTLE FIELD, BUT YOU NEVER DECLARED YOU WERE ACTUALLY PICKING IT UP AND TAKING IT WITH YOU WHEN YOU HEADED FOR TOWN!! THOSE RULES OF FAIR PLAY WORK BOTH WAYS. A PLAYER MUST DECLARE ANY ACTION, OR IT DOESN'T HAPPEN!! YOU LEFT THAT GOLD BEHIND!
HUH? LEFT IT BEHIND??
(GULP) HE'S RIGHT! WE NEVER SAID WE WE'RE PACKING IT UP AND TAKING IT WITH US!
HA HA! (SNORT) AND BY THE TIME YOU CAN MAKE IT BACK TO THE BATTLE FIELD, IT'S ALL GONE!! HEE HEE HOO!! I WISH YOU GUYS COULD SEE THE LOOK ON YOUR FACES! YOU NEVER SAW IT COMING!! (SNICKER) OH GAWD, I'M IN TEARS. YOU IDIOTS LEFT ALL THAT GOLD SITTING THERE!! HA! HA!
THIRTY MINUTES LATER...
I GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN, THAT A GOOD GM NEVER GLOATS WHEN HE GETS THE BEST OF HIS PLAYERS!

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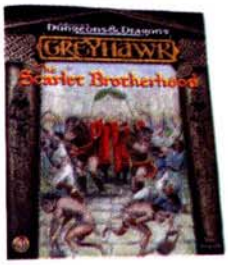
Send story ideas to jollyrb@aol.com or KODT, 1003 Monroe Pike, Marion, IN 46953

Previews

MARCH

The Scarlet Brotherhood

An AD&D® GREYHAWK® Accessory
By Sean Reynolds



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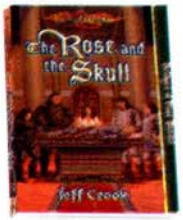

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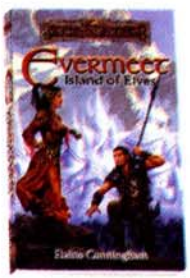

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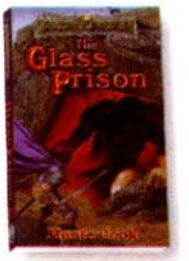

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TSR NEWS

Haunted Sites Winners

Thanks to everyone who sent in entries for the Haunted Sites contest from *DRAGON Magazine* issue #252. It was a truly chilling experience to read them all.

As is often the case, it was difficult to pick our three winners from so many excellent entries. The Haunted Sites contest was one of our most popular, and we were delighted to see so many responses. Gothic churches, remote mansions, country estates, and even entire cities made popular Haunted Sites. Beautiful, ghostly maidens; insane wizards, and spirit children were the most common inhabitants of these eerie settings. In fact, we found the not-so-friendly ghosts of children to be so compelling, that two of our three winners fall into this category. So without further ado, our winners are:

Joseph Dunn, of Columbus, Ohio, for "The Phantom Oracle"

Margaret L. Carter, of Annapolis, Maryland, for "Children in the Attic"

Jaleigh Johnson, of Arthur, Illinois, for "Rose Garden"

Congratulations to these three for really giving us the willies. For their efforts, each winner will receive a copy of every product in the 1999 RAVENLOFT® product line.

Constant Uploads

While the revived ARES section in *DRAGON Magazine* presents new game material each month, it isn't the only source for new material for your ALTERNITY game campaign. The TSR Web site (at **http://www.tsr.com**) continues to grow with new alien species, "Rogues Gallery" characters, star ships, and adventures (including the first STAR*DRIVE scenarios, *Black Starfall* and *Red Starrise*). Download some for your own game, or share your own creations with thousands of other ALTERNITY game fans.

Coming Attractions

Cover by Todd Lockwood

Mage vs. Machine

By Bruce R. Cordell

The Barrier Peaks cyst was only the beginning. Now the machines are overrunning hundreds of AD&D worlds, yours among them!

Little Tomb of Horrors

By Aaron Williams

Nodwick and company delve into the tomb of Acererak the Undying.

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By Lloyd Brown III

So what if the Kiwanis Club snubs your Wizard? There are plenty of organizations for spellcasters.

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By James Lowder

Four new characters by the author of *Spectre of the Black Rose.*

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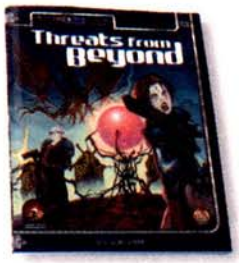
An ALTERNITY STAR*DRIVE Accessory
By Bill Slavicsek

Threats from Beyond reveals the details of an emerging alien conspiracy, adding unique campaign opportunities to any STAR*DRIVE campaign. The book ncludes new aliens, adventure hooks, and plenty of expansion material.



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Fantastic Voyages

A MARVEL SUPER HEROES Adventure
By Mike Selinker and Teeuwynn Woodruff

This adventure anthology features the FANTASTIC FOUR, with situations ripped from the pages of the World's Greatest Comics Magazine! The MARVEL SUPER HEROES Adventure Game is hot, and this product promises to add to the anticipation as the heroes face the villainous escapades of Doctor Doom, the Skrulls, and even the planet-eating menace of Galactus! Each adventure provides an evening of fun, or they can be combined into any ongoing Marvel campaign.

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MAY

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Edited by Jon Pickens

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By TSR Staff

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A STAR*DRIVE Anthology
Edited by Martin H. Greenberg

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A DRAGONLANCE Adventure, based on the original DL 1–14 modules.
By Steve Miller and Stan! Brown

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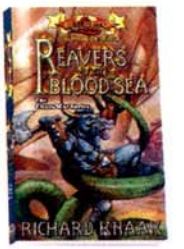

During the hottest summer in memory, minotaurs fight against the Knights of Takhisis, into whose hands their god Sargonnas has delivered them. In the midst of the conflict, the armies of Chaos plunge into the heart of Ansalon. Now the minotaur warrior Aryx must unite his people and their enemy, the knights, against the monstrous servants of Chaos. If he succeeds, the two sides may forge a bond that will change Krynn for all time. If he fails, then they will all perish.

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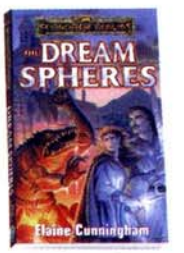
Dream Spheres

A FORGOTTEN REALMS novel
By Elaine Cunningham



Welcome to Waterdeep, the City of Splendors. Here, everything imaginable is for sale. Even dreams can be purchased, if one is willing to pay the price. When the sale of Dream Spheres threatens the life of his newfound half-sister, Danilo Thann joins forces with Arilyn Moonblade to uncover the source of this deadly trade. Their search leads them into the dark heart of Waterdeep, and to personal secrets that could destroy them both.

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J. ROBERT KING

The award-winning author of the PLANESCAPE® Blood Wars trilogy talks about hope, experimentation, weirdness, and big plans brewing for the world of Dominaria.

by Stephen Kenson

J. Robert King loves books. "Since fourth grade I've known I wanted to be a writer. Since that time I've been writing books. I wanted to be a writer because of The Chronicles of Narnia (by C.S. Lewis). A teacher read one of them to us in third grade, then my family moved, so I spent a summer at my grandparents' house in Bloomington, IL. There was no air conditioning and not a lot to do, so I thought I'd check out the rest of the books. I loved them so much; they provided such an escape. I really wanted to be able to create that sort of escape for other people. They were the sort of fantasy that first got me excited about writing."

Born in Phoenix, Arizona, King did a lot of his growing up in northwestern Indiana, in the shadow of Chicago. He majored in Theology and the Humanities at Valparaiso University in Indiana. After working for two years as an editor with a nonfiction publisher, King took an editing job at TSR, Inc. He wrote his first novel, *Heart of Midnight*, soon afterward.

King treasures his early work, such as *Rogues to Riches* and *Summerhill Hounds*, for TSR's First Quest line of novels, intended for younger readers. "They're two of my favorite books," he says, "but probably read the least. I think when we write for the older, mainstream audience we tend to make it gritty to convince people that these aren't fairy tales but "real" fantasy. I felt obligated to write something more optimistic, hopeful, and beautiful. It was a switch from writing two RAVENLOFT® books."

King is best known for his work in the RAVENLOFT setting, with *Heart of Midnight* and *Carnival of Fear*. His other work includes the DRAGONLANCE® novel *Vinas Solamnus* and the Blood Wars Trilogy for the PLANESCAPE setting: *Blood Hostages*, *Abyssal Warriors*, and *Planar Powers*. For the latter novel, he won the 1997 Origins Award for best game-related fiction.

When asked about the success of his novels, King responds, "I think people read the books for different reasons than I write them. With each one I think I'm trying to say something true. Saying something true about the human experience, even if it's about elves, dwarves, and dragons, is an important and difficult thing to do. I also think readers like the sense of experimentation. I've always enjoyed that in writing: not telling the story in the same way but telling a different story in a different way.

"*Planar Powers* is the third book in a very strange trilogy. The thing about that book is its sense of experimentation and humor. In writing it, I decided I wanted to write a book backward, starting broad and ending very narrow, a complex thing that became more simple. The first book is a tragedy, in which the character's flaws lead to his destruction. The second book is a passion play, in which the character is redeemed by the sacrifice of another, and the third book I wrote as a comedy, in which the flaws of the character lead to his salvation."

With the success of his writing and with two young sons (ages three and one), King chose to leave his editing position and write full-time. His latest projects are ambitious.

"My next book is *Time Streams* for the *Magic: the Gathering** setting (available in February 1999). After that is a *Magic* trilogy called the Phyrexian Cycle. It's a trilogy that culminates two major cycles in the *Magic* line. One is The Urza Cycle, which began with Jeff Grubb's book *The Brothers' War*. Urza's character arc comes to a culmination. The other is The Weatherlight Cycle, which began with the anthology *Rath and Storm*. I'm very pleased to write the books that bring those two cycles to their culmination, a massive invasion of Dominaria. Aside from that, I can't give away too much."

In addition, King is working on a fantasy novel for Tor Books. "The book I'm writing right now is called *Mad Merlin*, coming out in 2000. It's an epic Arthurian book about the life of Merlin. At the start, Merlin is a mad amnesiac. Through the story and his relationship to Arthur, Merlin begins to recover his memories, and the reader learns what he learns. This is the coming-of-age story of Arthur and Merlin; both start out basically as infants and grow through the story."

Even after so many novels, King hasn't lost his love for experimentation and surprises. "The thing with my books is, if you think it's weird now, wait a couple of pages. It gets weirder."

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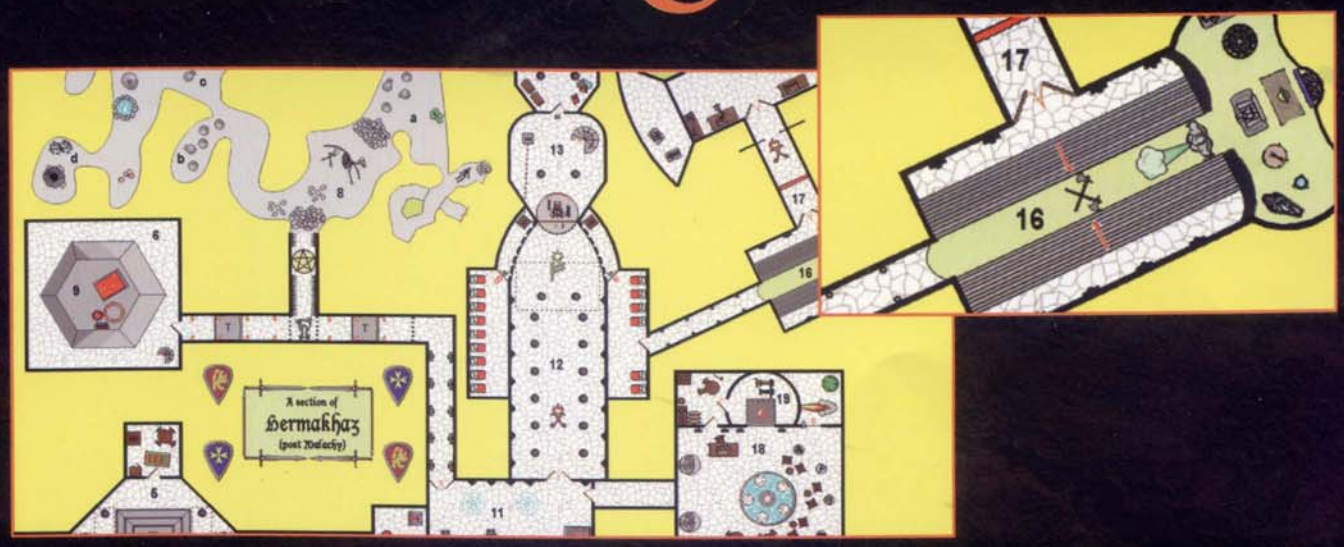

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